

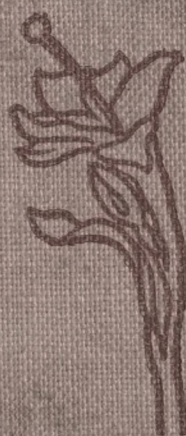
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MORE THAN
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MORE THAN CORONETS

STORIES OF KIND HEARTS

BY
LULU LINTON



CINCINNATI, O.
THE STANDARD PUBLISHING COMPANY

1903

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To the Kind Hearts

*Who have ever helped me in my work, I
gratefully dedicate this little book.*

"Howe'er it be, it seems to me,
 'Tis only noble to be good.
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
 And simple faith, than Norman blood."

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"MORE THAN CORONETS."

"Guess what has happened at Wayland's, mother."

The pastor of the Northcott Central Church turned in his study-chair, and regarded his mother with eyes that were twinkling with mischief.

"I'm sure I know nothing whatever of the happenings in the Wayland home. Why should I? Because Mrs. Wayland is our laundress, and her husband cares for your horse, and drives for you, you will persist in being interested in their affairs. I tell you I have no use for such people, further than seeing that they do my work well. We have no interests in common. But what particular happening could cause your eyes to twinkle so?" and Mrs. Van Orden paused for breath, picking up a magazine and turning the pages as if the answer could have no possible interest for her.

"Well, it's only this," and the pastor paused as if to choose his words carefully; "the house of Wayland has a son and heir born unto it this day. When I went to the stables to order Dexter for my afternoon calls, Barney told me the news, and asked me to step across the alley and view the wonderful personage."

"You didn't go?" gasped the mother.

"Yes, I went with him. I didn't go inside. Barney brought his son to the door for my inspection and approval. He was wrapped in so many folds

of red blanket that he was almost lost, but I got a glimpse of a wee, red mortal, with blinking eyes, tight-shut fists and a wide mouth. So far as I could judge, he looked just like the babies on Aristocracy Street." He paused, laughing at the expression on his mother's face, then added: "He had a wonderful voice. I shouldn't be surprised if he turned out a minister. Then you and Barney can get together and compare notes about the progress of your respective sons."

Mrs. Van Orden had just returned from a meeting of the Culture Circle, where she had read a lengthy paper, in which she had referred often to the masses and the common people, much as one would speak of a herd of cattle. The paper had been a pronounced success, because every lady present could count her ancestors by the dozen, and prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that there was no common blood in her veins.

The "Culture Circle" was called the "Blue Blood Circle" by some people. These people were not members of the circle, however, and did not live on Aristocracy Street. It was not really Aristocracy Street. It was just plain Aristock Street on the town map, but the wealthy people of Northcott had built up fine houses along its entire length, gradually ousting the poor people, until some wag had given it this nickname.

Mrs. Van Orden stood near her son's chair, tall and straight in her perfectly fitting street costume. In fact, you could hardly find an imperfection from her crown of beautiful, snow-white hair to the sole of her shapely, well-shod feet. People said

that her son was very like his mother, but, looking closely, one could see a kindlier light in his clear gray eyes, and where the lines of her mouth were a trifle cold and hard, his curved with gentle compassion.

Presently the mother said in tones quivering with indignation: "You didn't touch the child, I hope?"

"Yes, I took him in my arms and told Barney that he was a fine, healthy-looking boy, and so heavy. I think the weight was mostly blanket, but it pleased Barney so much that he told me the baby's name. You couldn't guess it in a week, mother."

"I'm quite sure that I shall not try," was the stiff reply. She had taken off her bonnet now, and was straightening out the glittering jet spangles.

"Well, he named him Rollie Raymond Wayland. He said he had always liked a name that 'sorter rhymed.' I couldn't see the rhyme, but if Barney could, that makes it all right. I hope the little fellow will grow to be a shining light in the world. I told Barney so, and his eyes glistened just like yours did the day I preached my first sermon."

"Don't talk foolishly, Paul," she said nervously. She had been rolling the ribbon ties of her bonnet, ready to pin them and put the bonnet away, but when he spoke of the day that had brought such pride and happiness into her life, the ribbon slipped from her trembling fingers, and unrolled its whole shimmering length, as, bending over, she kissed the broad, white forehead of the son who was her all—her pride, her life.

She felt that such grand things awaited him if he would only give up this foolish whim of being interested in common people, trying to help them in their sorrows, and rejoice with them in their times of happiness. She waxed eloquent now, as she spoke of Barney's son. What right had they, low-down, common servants, to think that their child could ever be anything in the world? Barney could scarcely read or write, and poor, simple Maggie, his wife, knew so much less than Barney that she looked up to him in an adoring way that was simply disgusting. There ought to be a law preventing marriage between such people. What could one expect of children born of such parents? They would likely grow up to be criminals, or fill the almshouses; they could not possibly be any benefit to an already overcrowded world.

Paul Van Orden listened patiently to all her arguments, then quoted gravely from Alice Carey's beautiful poem, where the settler's wife, looking at her babe in the cradle, says:

"Walls as narrow, and a roof as low,
Have sheltered a President, you know."

"That was all very well in poetry," his mother replied, but she continued her argument that there was no danger of Barney's roof ever sheltering a President, and, for her part, she did not intend to go near them, and she did wish that he would not talk with such people as if they were his equals. She was afraid it would ruin his influence with the Central Church if they came to know of his associating with the common people. There were

plenty of commonplace young preachers to take up slum work, because they were unfitted for higher things. At last, as if to clinch all that she had said, she asked: "What do you suppose Louise Lorimer would say if she knew that you had called on Barney Wayland and held his son in your arms?"

The twinkle in Paul Van Orden's eyes blossomed into a merry laugh at his mother's question. Louise Lorimer was always the final argument brought in by his mother. Judge Lorimer was the wealthiest man in the Central Church, owner of the finest residence on Aristocracy Street, and Miss Louise was his only child. She was the leading soprano in the church choir; in fact, she was the leader in everything she undertook—graceful, beautiful Louise, with blue blood enough to satisfy even fastidious Mrs. Van Orden, who had set her heart on having her for a daughter.

In all her well-laid plans to bring about this desire of her heart she had found Paul decidedly obstinate. He had heard in the beginning of his ministry with the church that Louise Lorimer was heartless, and had never taken the trouble to find out for himself whether or no the statement was true. Usually the mention of her name irritated him, but to-day it seemed to amuse him. He threw both arms about his mother as he answered, laughingly: "She knows all about my call. It seems that Maggie is the Lorimers' laundress, too, and it seems that some of Miss Louise's fancy laundry was to have been sent up this morning, but, owing to the event, the date was blotted from the Way-

land memory, so she had the coachman drive her down to see about it. Of course, Barney had to hunt up the laundry work, so he left me standing there holding his son. I couldn't very well dump the little fellow on the doorstep, so I held on until his father returned. While Barney was gone, his son decided to try a few runs in voice culture. He had a magnificent voice. Miss Lorimer looked out of her carriage to see where the voice came from, and when she saw me standing there with my arms full of red blanket, she smiled."

Thinking of the spectacle he must have made, standing at Barney's door, dressed in clerical attire ready for afternoon calls, holding Barney's much-beblanketed baby in his arms, he began to laugh, and laughed so much like his old boyish self, so like her Paul, instead of the Rev. Paul Van Orden, that his mother joined in, and laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks, and the discussion of the social problem was over, for that day at least.

And down across the alley, in the little house, Barney and Maggie were looking at the wee, red mite, and planning for the day when he would grow to be a "big preacher, jest like Mr. Paul, bless his kind heart."

Rollie Raymond Wayland grew in grace, knowledge, favor and stature, down in the little house back of the stately Van Orden residence. He was a sturdy little fellow, with a broad, healthy-looking face and keen, questioning blue eyes. He seemed to realize from the first that much depended on his good behavior, so, while Maggie washed and ironed,

he sat contentedly in the old second-hand cab, that had been purchased for the purpose of carrying the huge baskets of clothes to and from the big houses. A little past one year of age he toddled everywhere, following Barney to the stables, and it was there that Paul Van Orden renewed his acquaintance with Barney's son. On Saturday, when the minister was weary from his struggle with the sermon for Sunday, it came to be his established custom to lay aside his clerical attire and clerical manner, and, meeting Barney and the baby on neutral ground at the stables, romp for an hour with the baby, like some great, overgrown boy, while Barney watched them with admiring eyes.

At eighteen months Rollie Raymond could form sentences that were the wonder and delight of his parents and Paul Van Orden, who had watched the growth of this child with an interest he had never shown toward any little one born on Aristocracy Street. It may have been because the Aristocracy Street children were so hedged about by nurses, governesses and parents that he had no opportunity to study their characters, and it was different with Barney's and Maggie's child.

Maggie said it was wonderful the way Rollie Raymond took to Mr. Paul, but it troubled her beyond measure that she could not impress on her offspring the importance of showing proper respect for the minister. Rollie Raymond was not a believer in either prefixes or suffixes, as attachments to his friend's name, so, in spite of motherly chastisement, whenever he caught sight of the min-

ister he would call out in a shrill baby voice, "Hal-lo, Van!"

The minister would laugh, and toss him in his strong arms, as if he liked the simple, heartfelt greeting, and Barney, watching with fatherly pride, would dream of the day when his son would bring honor to the family name of Wayland.

One day Barney brought to the stables a worn copy of a Greek text-book, and showed it to Paul Van Orden with great solemnity. The minister looked at it for a moment, then burst out with: "Why, Barney, old fellow, what use will you have for this?" and Barney, leaning nearer, answered confidentially: "It's fer the little feller, you know, We want him to be a minister like yourself, and I knowed he'd have to learn Greek, and seein' this at a second-hand store, marked down cheap, I got it to lay away fer him." And Paul Van Orden, seeing the pride in the father's eyes, checked the laugh that rose in his throat, at the thought of the odd bargain.

As time passed, Mrs. Van Orden still maintained a rigid reserve toward the Waylands. When she caught glimpses of the "little feller," in his pink calico slip, with his tumbled yellow curls gleaming in the sunlight as he toddled after Barney, she would look another way. But Rollie Raymond did not lack friends.

One day the minister found him seated on a peck measure, sucking an orange of huge dimensions, while he watched his father feed and care for the horses. "Tell Mister Van Orden who sends you oranges," said Barney, and Rollie Raymond

answered complacently, between tugs at the orange: "Wese."

"Did you ever!" said Barney, proudly. "He means Miss Louise, but we can't git him to say all of her name no more'n he will yours. Ever' time I take the clothes up, Miss Louise has somethin' nice to send to the little feller; awful nice she is to poor folks, bless her sweet face."

The minister turned away, wondering if he had misjudged the lovely Miss Lorimer, after all. Could it be that her cold, faultless manner was only a mask for her better self?

Rollie Raymond neared his second birthday. The hot August days came on, and there were no cool breezes in the little house with its low roof, and fires kept always burning for either the washings or ironings. One day the baby did not toddle after Barney to the stables, and when the minister came down to ask for him, Barney answered, choking back a dry sob of anguish: "The little feller's sick."

The best physician in Northcott came to the little house, at the peremptory summons of the Rev. Paul Van Orden. All night they battled with the death angel. Once the blue eyes looked up with their natural light into the face of the minister bending over the cradle. A smile passed over the little face that had been so drawn with pain, and the baby lips murmured: "Van! Hello, Van!" Then the blue eyes closed forever, before they had ever witnessed life's toil and strife.

Paul Van Orden turned away from the cradle with a heart almost bursting with sympathy for

the stricken parents. His mother could not understand his grief. Three children had been taken from homes on Aristocracy Street within the month, for death had been no respecter of aristocracy. The Rev. Van Orden had officiated at each of the funerals, offering his sympathy in appropriate, well-chosen words, but when he held services in the little house the prayer seemed to come from his heart, and in the simple, comforting talk that followed, his mother (whom he had prevailed upon to accompany him) felt the tears stealing silently down her cheeks. She had never heard her son talk like that.

Maggie had told the minister how Miss Louise put the baby's best white frock on him, had brushed the golden curls and placed sweet flowers all about his tiny form. Paul had told his mother about Miss Lorimer's kindness, and this had been her chief reason for relenting enough toward these common people to attend the funeral of their child.

When the services were over, the casket was opened for a last look at the baby form. The little hands were dimpled and the cheeks were round, for death had come too hurriedly to leave marks of suffering. A smile still lingered on the baby lips, and the minister, clasping Barney's and Maggie's hands, stood by the little coffin, his strong, young frame shaking with great sobs as he looked at the face of his true little friend.

Mrs. Van Orden was surprised at her son's lack of control, and looked about the room in chagrin, but noted with satisfaction that Louise Lorimer

stood sobbing, too, on the other side of the little coffin.

Maggie forgot the indifference with which Mrs. Van Orden had treated her baby, and felt only gratitude toward her for her presence at the funeral, but Barney remembered and treasured in his heart a resentment for every slight that had been shown toward "the little feller."

After the funeral, Barney and Maggie went about their tasks in a hopeless, heart-broken way. The little house had lost its light, and it seemed for a time that there was nothing left to live for.

Paul Van Orden's kindly, helpful words were very sweet to them in the long, lonely days filled with dull, never-ending toil.

The autumn and winter dragged slowly by, and at last spring came, covering the little mound in the cemetery with soft, green carpeting. Barney and Maggie spent the Sunday afternoons by the side of the little grave, planning to save money to purchase a monument.

It would take a long time, but they could do without some things, and there was the little account they had started to save for Rollie Raymond's education.

August came. The anniversary of the baby's birth passed, then came the anniversary of his death. It was Sunday, and Barney and Maggie had spent the afternoon by the little grave. They were still planning for the monument, but the money came so slowly and it seemed so long to wait.

As they came slowly back toward the town, the air, which had been dense and sultry all the afternoon, became almost unbearable. Low, muttering thunder sounded in the west, and the lightning flashed again and again over the town. Just as they came in sight of the Central Church one swift, blinding sheet of lightning played for an instant about the slender spire, wrapping it in its dangerous folds; a deafening crash sounded, and flames shot up about the foot of the tower, and over the roof. Barney and Maggie ran to get nearer the church, and were soon in the midst of an excited throng of people. Every one seemed to think that some one else had notified the Fire Department, and so no one sent in the alarm.

The fire was under full headway, and there seemed no chance to save the church. Men wrung their hands and women sobbed, to see their beautiful church destroyed, but suddenly a voice pierced through all other sounds, as Mrs. Van Orden ran wildly down the street, crying: "O my son, my son! He was in his study, and he must be stunned. Will no one go for him?" The people burst into a wail; they loved their young pastor; but no one stirred, for the roof was already beginning to sink. Mrs. Van Orden looked imploringly toward the crowd of well-dressed men standing helplessly before her, then, with a look of scorn, she darted across the street toward the church. A dozen hands caught and held her, and a dozen voices explained that to enter meant certain death.

Then out from their midst burst Barney. Into the church he ran, and was lost from sight in the

smoke and flames. The moments seemed hours to the waiting crowd, but presently he staggered out with the form of their beloved pastor lying unconscious in his arms. He fell at the steps, overcome by the heat, but ready hands carried both unconscious forms to the opposite side of the street, just as the roof fell in with a sickening crash.

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The next day Mrs. Van Orden entered the little house for the second time. By her side was her son, pale, but unharmed, and her heart was overflowing with gratitude toward Barney, who had saved him for her. She carried a well-filled purse in her hand, for in what other way could she show her gratitude to such people?

Poor Barney was propped up in bed, his face and hands blistered and his hair singed. Mrs. Van Orden did not notice, in her anxiety to settle her debt, that Louise Lorimer was sitting by Maggie's side, with one of Maggie's hard, rough hands clasped closely in her own dainty white ones.

"Barney," she began with quivering voice, "Barney, what can I do to repay you for what you did for me yesterday?"

She fingered the clasp of her purse nervously, and Barney turned his head to hide the look of disgust and contempt that crept over his face, then said: "I'll have to tell you, I didn't do it fer you, mom; I done it fer love of Mr. Paul, and in mem'ry of the little feller. Mr. Paul was always good to me and Maggie, good like we was folks same as he was, not like we was animals, as some folks seems

to think poor folks is, and he was so good to the little feller too. Jest a year ago yesterday, he stood by the coffin and cried with us, and we knowed he loved him too. They ain't nothin' too hard fer me to undertake fer Mr. Paul," and his voice was lost in a sob.

Mrs. Van Orden dropped the purse into her lap in a shamed way, and wiped the tears from her eyes. Presently Barney continued:

"We was out to the cemetery jest before the fire, plannin' fer his little monument, and talkin' how we'd meant fer his life to be diff'runt from our'n. Why, mom, we'd even hoped he'd grow grand and noble, and be a minister like your son. I guess we'd planned too high. I guess you'd think he didn't have the kind of blood in his veins as makes such men as Mr. Paul."

The working people all knew about the "Blue Blood Circle," and this was a home thrust.

"Don't!" sobbed Mrs. Van Orden. "Don't say such things. What does blood matter? Of all those who stood watching death approaching my son, not one dared to save him but you. Barney, you have the blood of a hero in your veins, and if your son had lived he could have been all that my son is, or more."

As she sank back sobbing in the chair by his bed, she reached for Barney's poor, bandaged hand and poured forth her thanks just as she would have done had her son's rescuer been a resident of Aristocracy Street, and Barney's eyes glistened with honest pride, and his enmity was forgotten. Louise Lorimer and Paul Van Orden clasped hands, and

exchanged one glance that meant more than many words could have expressed.

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Mrs. Van Orden has resigned her position as president of the Culture Circle. Over her desk hangs the motto:

"Howe'er it be, it seems to me,
'Tis only noble to be good.
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

Her acquaintances shrug their shoulders, and say that she has taken up the fad of slumming, but the grateful people whom she has helped look upon her as an angel of mercy.

In the cemetery she has erected over a little mound in an obscure corner a snowy monument, bearing these words:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
ROLLIE RAYMOND WAYLAND,
SON OF
BARNEY AND MAGGIE WAYLAND.
Born August 10, 1896.
Died August 15, 1898.

"And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 2-4).

A PROPHET IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.

"Why don't you go home for Thanksgiving?" The question stood out boldly on the printed page as the Hon. John Maitland lifted his morning paper from the table.

He read on down the column: "You planned to go last year, but something prevented. Why not go this year to see the old folks? Just the word 'Thanksgiving' is fraught with memories of the golden-tinted days of youth. It calls up visions of the old homestead, and we long to revisit the scenes of our childhood. Ask your local agent about the cut rates. The limit for tickets is thirty days. This will give you ample time to see your old friends, and to see the old home. Why not go now?"

Ah! it was only a railroad advertisement after all. The Hon. John Maitland laid the paper down and turned his attention to his breakfast, but somehow he did not enjoy it. He swallowed his coffee in hasty gulps, and left the table. As he passed through the corridors of the hotel, men bowed to him obsequiously, and women cast furtive glances at the handsome, preoccupied face.

He passed down the street to his office with the question ringing through his brain, "Why not go home?"

The clerks in the office greeted him with marked respect; clearly, he was a great man. Usually the

homage he received was very gratifying, but to-day he scarcely noticed it. He was going back over the last fifteen years of his life, back to the time when he had come to the new Western town, a mere boy, so far as worldly experience went. He had been only twenty then, and now, fifteen added to twenty—yes, he was thirty-five. He could hardly realize that the time had been so long, the years had been so full.

With a fair education, he had worked his way up, gradually winning the respect of the people. He had studied law outside of his working-hours, and had mastered his subject. He had held offices of trust in the town, and had been chosen as Senator from his district for a term; then had opened his office in the town, now grown large and influential, and had received a large share of the practice. He had invested part of his earnings in a new gold mine, the mine had proven very rich, and he considered himself a fortunate man. He felt sure that few boys would have made of themselves what he had made of himself with so few opportunities. He remembered the years of struggle and of toil vividly.

He remembered the terrible homesickness and longing for his own people. At first he had meant to acquire only a competence and then go back East. "Why have I not gone sooner?" he asked himself, and his breath came hard as he thought of the answer—a woman's falseness. A blue-eyed sweetheart had clung to him at parting, sobbing out her vows to be true to him until he came home, and he had believed in her as firmly as he believed

in God above; but absence had not strengthened her love as it had his. In two years she had given her heart to his rival, and the home paper had come to him with a brilliant account of the wedding. He remembered the bitter disappointment that had crushed him for months; then the old ambition had returned, not exactly the same ambition either, for where once he had worked for love's sweet sake, he toiled now simply for the sake of honor and distinction. His labor had been rewarded, but his heart had grown cold. The longing for home had been thrust in the background. He had written home regularly, and had sent generous checks at Christmas, but he had never gone for the visit he once longed to make. Something in the quaint advertisement had touched him as nothing else had done for years. The clerks smiled at each other as they heard him humming softly, "Old Folks at Home." That night he dreamed of his mother, and woke with a feeling that she had really been near him. He could feel the touch of her hand on his forehead as she had smoothed back his hair, just as of old.

At the breakfast table he opened the morning paper and found the same question staring him squarely in the eye, "Why not go home for Thanksgiving?" He read the advertisement all through, and as he came to the last line, "Why not go now?" he answered mentally, "I will go."

He wondered at his feeling of light-heartedness as he walked to the office. He chuckled over the shrewdness of the advertiser in getting such a hold on his readers; for, surely, if he succumbed so

easily, others less strong than he would naturally do so.

After a time he remembered that the advertisements were written by a boy from his own State; in fact, from the adjoining county to the one where he was born and reared. The boy had come to him asking aid in getting a position; he had secured a place for him with a railway company, and then had forgotten him. The boy must have been very clever to have written such a taking advertisement.

The Hon. John Maitland decided to look him up. He had a vacancy in his own office for just such a boy as that. Suddenly the thought came to him that the boy had been away from home two years. He remembered his own terrible homesickness as the second Thanksgiving had approached, and he had known that his chair would still be vacant at the old home table. The boy was surely homesick, and he should go home as he went. Surely there was one little corner of the Honorable's heart that had not turned to stone. At noon he entered the railroad office, and, walking up to the boy's desk, asked abruptly: "Why not go home for Thanksgiving?"

The boy's sensitive face quivered and his eyes filled, but he asked, with a gleam of humor: "Did my advertisement strike you as fetching?"

"Yes; so very much so that I'm going home next week, and I'm going to take you with me as a reward for reminding me that I ought to go. I want you to be ready to start on the 15th. I have made all arrangements with your employer; it is all right, and your time goes on just the same."

The boy's face fairly glowed with delight, and he caught the firm, white hand lying on his shoulder in a grip that made the big man wince.

The days that followed were busy ones for the Hon. John Maitland. He wrote home of his intended visit, his business had to be adjusted for the month's absence, and his clients notified of his intentions. Many protests were made about his leaving for so long a time, but only one had any weight, and that was just a silent, regretful glance from the gray eyes of his friend, Miss May. She had been his friend for a long time; in fact, she was the first girl he had known well after coming to the Western town. She had taught in the schools all these years, being promoted from the small frame building of fifteen years ago to one of the elegant new buildings of the present time. They had been such good comrades. She had been a sympathetic listener to all his plans, and had rejoiced with him in his success. He had often wondered why some man had not found out her virtues and taken her from the drudgery of teaching, but the thought had always brought a tinge of dislike for the probable man.

When he came to the packing of his trunk, he looked with pride at his handsome clothing, contrasting it with the best suit which he had worn when he came West. In the bottom of his trunk he packed his oldest suit; it might be useful to wear if he went hunting, and the soft felt hat in the hat-box would do to wear with it. His traveling-suit, made in the latest style, showed off his fine form to advantage, and the shining silk hat

that graced his handsome head left no doubt as to his right to be called Honorable.

The long days of travel drew to a close. The man and the boy had become fast friends during the journey. The boy was looking forward joyfully to the glad home-coming, and the man was thinking of the effect his elegance, wealth and high standing would have on the people who had known him as a poor boy.

As they neared their journey's end, the man made a careful toilet, slowly brushed his silk hat, and threw back his shoulders proudly. The boy watched him with a frown on his fair face.

When the train drew up with a rattle and a shriek at the little station it seemed to the Honorable that half the countryside had gathered to do him honor; but when he stepped from the platform not a hat was lifted. The crowd made a rush for him, and hearty cries of "Hello, Jack!" "How are you, Jack?" and "Jack, old feller, how you've growed!" filled the air. The hearty country greetings jarred on his sensitive nerves, and he turned to look for his father.

Ah! that white-haired man with the stooped shoulders—how he had broken! But the voice was just the same as he welcomed his broad-shouldered son. They hurried away through the crowd, and the people forgave them for hurrying. "Jack was in a hurry to see his mother; he always was a great mother boy," they said kindly.

Mother was standing in the door. Her face was framed in white hair, too, but the same mother love beamed from it that he remembered so well.

No awe of fine clothes kept her from clasping him to her heart that had longed so for his coming. His sister, grown plump and matronly, stood waiting with her husband and children to welcome him. The children were anxious to see this wonderful "Uncle Jack" of whom they had heard so much. The oldest child (his namesake), aged ten, eyed him with approval, deciding that some day he would wear a tall hat, too. In the meantime, he meant to try on this one at the earliest opportunity.

The family all talked at once, asking the Honorable questions and telling him all the news of the past fifteen years. His head ached from traveling, and after an early supper he pleaded fatigue and went up the stairway to his old room. The wind whistled shrilly through the cracks around the windows, and rattled the loose shingles of the old roof. He shivered as he crept into the cold bed and thought of his elegant steam-heated apartments in the Western hotel.

He could hear his father and mother talking in the sitting-room below. Finally he heard his mother saying, in an apologetic tone: "He was so tired, father, that he just forgot; he'll be all right in the morning and be like himself, I know he will."

He listened keenly now. He heard his father read a lesson from the Bible; he had forgotten the family worship. He listened to his father's prayer, so full of thanksgiving for the dear son's return, and a sense of shame swept over him.

Long after the clock was wound, the fire covered, and the light put out downstairs, the Honorable lay awake battling with his pride. He thought of

the years of toil and struggle to gain honor and wealth, so that he might come back and get even with the world.

There was old Squire Portland, who had held the mortgage on the old home farm; his feelings were bitter toward him. It was the Squire, with his threats of foreclosure, that had hurried him out in the world away from all that he held dear. He had hoarded his savings until there was enough to pay off the mortgage, but the grudge that he owed the proud, stingy old man had never been paid. There was the sweetheart who had deserted him for his rival; how he had longed to flaunt his wealth in their faces! He had longed to show to all the little village his superiority, but his mother's voice kept ringing in his ears: "He'll be all right in the morning and be like himself."

"Like himself?" What did his mother mean—what had he really been like fifteen years ago? Little by little, memory turned her pages for him, and he saw the merry, light-hearted boy, a general favorite in the neighborhood. A strong worker in the church, the best singer in the singing-school, a leader in all of the winter evening festivities of the country place, a father's right hand, a mother's comfort, a sister's pride. He looked at the pictures of the healthy, happy boy, then looked at his later self, and shuddered as he realized how he had changed to a cold, calculating man of the world. It came over him now that all of the honor showered upon him in the Western town was tribute paid to his wealth.

At last he had fought the battle, and his better self had won. He would get up in the morning and do all in his power to atone for the past; he would be like his own true self once more.

He fell into peaceful sleep, and was awakened in the gray dawn by his father calling, "Jack! O Jack! time to get up, son."

He searched in the trunk for the old suit, and found that it looked quite genteel. As he went through the kitchen he gave his mother a hug—a genuine, old-fashioned hug—and she looked up from her work in pleased surprise. When he plunged his face and hands into the tin pan of icy water at the well, he chuckled to himself as he thought of the pampered fellow out West who pressed a button for warm water on mornings like this. It was hard to be one's self when one had to go back fifteen years to do it; but when the Honorable set his head to do a thing, he gave all his attention to making a success of it.

By night he felt that he was making good headway. He had shaken hands with all of the villagers; he had visited the village blacksmith, and had asked him to play all the old tunes on his fiddle, that he remembered hearing him play long ago. The old fiddler was delighted with his memory, especially so as he had learned no new pieces to play. He had visited the village store and laughed at the same old jokes he had heard when a boy. He had hunted up the three men who had formed with himself the village quartette. The second tenor (his brother-in-law now) and the two basses were all staid married men, busy with their

corn-husking, but his enthusiasm stirred their sluggish blood, and they promised to come in of evenings and practice up the old songs.

After supper, his mother said: "Jack, take a basket and a lamp and get you some apples from the warm-house. You was always great for having apples every night."

In the old warm-house, things were unchanged by the lapse of time. Over in the southwest corner was the bin of Prior Reds, in the southeast corner the Rhode Island Greenings, on the south side were the rows of canned fruit, and the huge jar that was always filled in the fall with sauerkraut, and on the north side was the bin of Golden Pippins. As his teeth crushed into the cheek of one of these, his favorites, he gave a sigh of delight such as he had not given over any of the rich finds of his gold mine. At bedtime he took the Bible from the stand and read the evening lesson, and tears of joy stood in his mother's eyes.

As the days rolled by, he slipped into the old grooves gradually, and from doing things from a sense of duty, he came to enjoy doing them.

As it neared Thanksgiving he felt the old boyish delight in the preparations. He practised Thanksgiving music with the quartette of evenings, he stemmed raisins for the mince meat, and cut up pumpkin ready to stew, all with a checked apron tied around his neck, much to the delight of the small nephew and niece, who came over to watch operations. He found that his mother was fattening two pullets for the dinner, and he immediately set them free; then, taking his mother by the shoul-

ders, he asked, "Mother, why do you skimp and save so? Haven't I sent you plenty of money?" and she answered timidly, "You've been awful good and generous, Jack, but we're looking out for the time when we won't be able to work, and we've tried to save all we could."

"Mother—mother!" he cried, in genuine distress, "did you think I would ever see you want for anything? Why, mother, I'm a rich man, and I will take good care of you," and he turned away with a choke in his voice as he thought of his own luxurious living.

Half an hour later, he came dashing in to tell his mother that he was going out to get his Thanksgiving turkey. "Do you remember the time when I shucked corn all day for Uncle Jim Parsons to get our Thanksgiving turkey, and then he gave me the meanest little turkey in the whole drove?" he asked. "Well, I said then that some day I would go out there with my money and buy the biggest turkey he had, and now I'm going." And he started with his nephew for the tramp across the fields. He came back with a huge gobbler across his shoulder, panting from his unwonted exertion, but happy as a boy over his bargain.

The day before Thanksgiving his father came in with a troubled look on his usually calm face. The news had come that Squire Portland and his wife were to be taken to the poor-house on the morrow.

The Squire's boys had been reckless fellows and had squandered all their father's money. The old home place had been mortgaged, and now that the

mortgage had been foreclosed they had no place to go.

A month before, the Honorable would have smiled grimly and said, "It serves the mean old fellow right," but it was different now. The spirit of Thanksgiving was in his heart, and it seemed a dreadful thing to lose one's home on that blessed day.

Before night the mortgage was paid off, and the Honorable forgave the stingy old Squire as he saw him grasp the paper with trembling hands, trying to read the blessed reprieve through tear-dimmed eyes, then he hurried away to escape their thanks.

On Thanksgiving morning his mother asked anxiously, "You remember Clarinda?" Remember her! The dark eyes clouded at the name that had not been mentioned since his return.

His mother hurried on: "Word has just come that Jake's got his leg broke at the mill. They're awful poor and hard run, and I wondered if you'd mind to carry them some of our Thanksgiving dinner. They live out on the old Bartley place."

The Honorable swallowed the last remnant of his pride and said that he didn't mind. He carried the well-filled basket across the fields to the cabin, and when he saw the poor wreck of manhood on the bed he forgave his rival. He watched the faded, slatternly woman who talked to him in a shrill voice. Could this be the blue-eyed girl he had loved? He contrasted her with a gentle, sweet-voiced woman in a far-away Western town, and then he forgave his old sweetheart.

He hurried back to the Thanksgiving service in the little church.

He sang Thanksgiving hymns with the quartette, and after the older men had talked, he stood up and poured forth all his thankfulness for being allowed to come home to find his old friends unchanged toward him. He had the reputation of being an eloquent speaker, and he never spoke better than he did that day. Eyes grew dim in the old church as they listened to the voice they loved.

After the services came the dinner—but why try to describe it? It was just a genuine old-fashioned Thanksgiving dinner, with none of the family missing. After dinner, the old neighbors came in and there were songs and games. In the midst of the merriment a shrill cry from an upper room sent grandma flying up the stairs, followed by Uncle Jack. In the center of the room lay the remains of the silk hat, and the excited namesake told of its downfall. “I just—just thought I—I—would try it on, to see how I’d look when I get big like Uncle Jack, and when I took it off and laid it on the floor a minute Sissy set down on it, and it smashed, and I won’t ever wear an old thing like that; I’ll have one what won’t smash.” Uncle Jack laughed until tears stood in his eyes, then carried the frightened little girl downstairs on his shoulder.

The happy days rolled by and his time was up. He was waiting at the little station for the train, and his friends crowded round him. He had promised his mother to come next Thanksgiving, and he had promised himself that he would not come

alone, if a little schoolteacher could be persuaded to give up her work for his sake, and he felt very hopeful of his powers of persuasion.

As the train came rattling in and slowed up, every one seemed to be trying to shake his hands at the same time. After he entered the coach, the three-fourths of the quartette he was leaving behind came close to the open car-window and sang "Auld Lang Syne," and as the train pulled out the crowd seemed to shout all together, "Good-by, Jack! take care of yourself!"

Turning from the window, the Honorable found the boy standing by his side smiling, and he said huskily, "A prophet may be without honor in his own country, but he is not without love."

A CUFFLESS PROFESSOR.

There was a vacancy in the Brantford schools, with thirteen applicants—an unlucky number, the school board decided after they had voted for an hour, and were no nearer a decision than in the first ballot.

In the pause for rest, Dr. Andrews, president of the board, said: "By the way, I just happened to think of a letter that I have in my pocket. I'd like to read it to you; it is from a brother practitioner who lives in a little town down in the country, telling about one of his friends who is moving up here for the benefit of his wife's health. He says: 'If it is ever possible for you to do the man a favor, do it by all means. I had thought it might be possible that some day there would be a vacancy in the ranks of your aristocratic school. My friend is especially fine in government of boys, having strong influence over them. He is honest as the day is long, or, I might say, he is as honest as he is long; it would mean just as much, for he is a great six-footer, but his brilliant mind towers above his height until he would be a valuable addition to even such a school as yours. If you can ever do him a favor, I am sure he would appreciate it, as would also your friend and brother—'

"There it is," Dr. Andrews remarked, as he folded the letter up and replaced it in his pocket. "I had almost forgotten the fellow, but I'm half

a mind to run him in as a dark horse against all these high-school misses," waving his hand at the crumpled ballots that strewed the floor. "We could give as our excuse, that we needed a man on account of the government of the room. I'm sure that my nephew needs him, and he is said to be the leader in that room. I believe my nephew has the name of being rather high-spirited."

The members of the school board all silently agreed that Jack Andrews, the nephew and especial pet of their president, needed something to quell the high spirits that had been the despair of every teacher from the baby room up. It had been risky business to try to govern the boy who bore the sobriquet "The school board's nephew," for it was generally understood that Dr. Andrews (to use a slang phrase) was "the whole thing," and that when he recommended a teacher, said teacher was sure of a position.

The outcome of the board meeting for the selection of a teacher to fill the vacancy, was the appointment of Professor Cupples, from the back country district.

This timely good fortune fell like a blessing from above into the professor's little home, and the invalid wife wept tears of thankfulness that her talented husband would escape the factory work for which he had made application, and would be in his own element; but, alas for her fond hopes! the professor from the back district was not in his element.

When he stood at his desk to greet the children on the first morning of school, he realized that he

had never met children like them, and the children were quick to perceive that he was not of Brantford circles. It was Jack Andrews, Jr., who discovered that the new instructor wore a queer bow tie, and he whispered audibly, "Get onto the shoo-fly." This set the pace for the entire room, and criticism was the order of the days from thenceforth.

When the professor stood up to read a morning lesson in his thoughtful, earnest way, the embryo artists in the room made sketches of his lengthy form, others noted that his pants were too short and not properly creased, and still others saw the shiny streaks across the back of the coat that had done service as Sunday best for a long time.

The climax was reached one day when Jack Andrews noticed that the professor did not wear cuffs. In writing upon the blackboard, his great, brown hands and sinewy wrists escaped from the short coat sleeves, and made themselves generally conspicuous.

Jack passed a note around the room that created much amusement; on it was written the one word, "Cuffless."

In a few days it occurred to Jack's fertile brain that the name "Cupples" and the word "cuffless" were very similar in sound. So he dubbed his teacher "Professor Cuffless," and the name stuck, as such names have a trick of doing.

The days that followed were trying ones to the teacher, especially so as he kept all the worries locked in his own heart, away from the invalid wife.

The children were only thoughtless, but oh, how thoughtlessness can hurt a sensitive soul!

When the school board came to hear of some of the pranks that were played in Room 6, Dr. Andrews shook his head, saying, "I'm afraid it was a mistake, putting that man in; the children will never obey any one for whom they have no feeling of respect, and the idea of a professor without cuffs—" He paused there as if nothing could be said in favor of such a man.

One day Sammy Johnson, who lived next door to the professor, called his crowd aside and confided the joke of the season. "Boys, what do you think?" he said. "Professor Cuffless does housework, cooks and scrubs and does things of nights, for I've seen him at it. Say, s'pose you fellows come over after dark to-night, and we'll slip over our back fence and watch him at work in the kitchen."

This proposal met with ready assent, and that night a line of boys crept over Sammy's back fence, slipped noiselessly near the kitchen window, and beheld the professor with his big, awkward hands embedded in—dough. It was so very amusing that it was almost impossible to keep from laughing aloud, but they watched while he prepared the supper according to instructions given by a pale little woman who sat near the table. It was not a very elaborate meal that the professor prepared, but the two partook of it cheerfully, then after the meal the professor gathered the little woman up in his arms, as if she had been a child, and carried her into the sitting-room. The boys felt rather uncomfortable; they had not known that the professor's

wife could not walk. They watched him clear away the supper things and wash the dishes, then he stretched a line across the room near the stove, and, taking some wet clothing from a basket, he shook out the pieces and hung them up to dry. It was wearing apparel, and the professor had washed it.

The boys crept out silently; it did not seem so funny as they had imagined it would. They were sorry they had promised to make cartoons of the professor at work, for the benefit of those who could not go with them. For several days there was such a pronounced change in the room that the professor grew hopeful of better things, but youthful hearts forget easily, and they soon returned to the old spirit of criticism and fun-making.

Jack Andrews, Jr., carried home the funny sketches, and told funny stories about his new instructor, and his uncle tried to be severe, but always ended by laughing at them and blaming the professor for the lack of respect shown him.

The winter was a hard one, and the professor grew thin and pale from working to control the room, and trying to win the good will of the children. At the beginning of the school year he had hoped to do such good work that it would make his services in demand for another year, but, as the days went by, he relinquished that hope, and now only hoped that at the very last the children would realize that he had tried to help them and to be their friend.

One morning near the end of the school year, a group of boys gathered about Sammy Johnson while he told them how his mother had found out

the reason that the professor did the housework. They were saving every penny so that his wife could go to the hospital for an operation. They were hoping that she would be able to walk if the operation was successful, but it was so very expensive that it would take the savings of years to have it done, so it was hard times in the professor's home. Then Jack Andrews, who had fidgeted uneasily all through this confidence, told his piece of news. He had overheard his uncle telling his mother that Professor Cupples would lose his place in the schools because the children had no respect for him, and that Room 6 had not been doing well under his direction. There was to be a principal at the East building, and the teacher of the seventh room was to have this position in connection with his other work, and with fifteen dollars on the month more salary than Professor Cupples received. He had heard his uncle mention the name of Professor Smithers.

At the name of Professor Smithers, indignation burst forth, and exclamations of, "Not respect Professor Cupples! Indeed we do;" "It's a mean old shame to turn him out when he's down on his luck;" "He's worth a dozen of that dude of a Smithers," filled the air.

After a tirade of angry words against the school board, they turned against their leader, and Sammy Johnson had the support of the entire crowd when he said: "It's all your fault, Jack Andrews, and you know it. You commenced it; you made fun of him the very first day, and the rest of us were fool enough to follow you. You've gone and done

it this time with your smartness, getting a good man out of a job and getting a no-'count one in. Hope you'll feel satisfied when you get a teacher with plenty of cuffs and no brains. We'd all 'a' liked him all the time if you'd 'a' behaved; he's the smartest teacher we ever had, and I just wish he could 'a' been promoted with us and 'a' got that extra money; and we'll miss him next year when we get over into hard work, and nobody with any brains to explain things, and we might 'a' had him if you'd 'a' let us alone." Here he paused for breath, and Jack looked sullen for a moment, then his better self came to the front, and he said in a humble tone, a tone that none of them had ever heard him use before:

"I'm as sorry as I can be, and I'll make it right if you'll all stand by me. I've been thinking about getting up a petition, and having everybody in the room sign it, and take it to the board meeting; they're going to meet to-night, I heard Uncle Jack say so."

This speech was greeted by three rousing cheers, and Jack neglected his first lesson to prepare a document that read as follows:

We, the undersigned, request that Professor Cupples be promoted to Room 7 with us next year, and that he be made principal of the building with some more salary, because of his wife's health, so he won't have to work so hard at home; and we want it understood that we all respect him, and we know he is the best teacher we have ever had, and we need him awful bad next year to help us pull through when we get where it's hard to understand things.

This document might not have been considered a success from a legal standpoint, but it voiced the

sentiment of the entire room, as was proven by the list of names written underneath long before night.

That night, when the board met, the first business was the discussion of the needs of the East school, and it was decided that a principal was needed, one to whom the other teachers could go in the absence of the superintendent, reporting all unruly cases to him. It was further decided that this position be given to the teacher who would have charge of Room 7, giving said teacher an increase of salary.

The name of Professor Cupples was mentioned, but Dr. Andrews made a very decided speech against such promotion. "It would never do to promote *him* to Room 7," he said, "because he would then have charge of the same children that had been in Room 6, and he has forfeited the respect of the entire room by his careless attire." The president of the board closed his speech by proposing the name of a dudish little fellow who always wore the latest cut of fashion, and parted his hair exactly in the middle.

There was hesitation for a time in the meeting, and it seemed for once that Dr. Andrews was not the entire board. Then right into the midst of the room trooped a crowd of excited boys, headed by Jack Andrews, Jr., who laid the petition down on the table in front of his uncle. The board watched this proceeding with astonishment, then Dr. Andrews, thinking it some mischievous prank, requested his nephew to take his friends and himself from the room, immediately.

Jack Andrews felt no fear of the school board's president, and proceeded to make his speech. He

had been all day preparing a masterful effort, but in the excitement of the moment it all left him, and he burst out in boy fashion: "I say, us fellers want this stopped, and there's our petition to stop it. We want it understood right now that we never respected anybody any more'n we do Professor Cupples, and we ain't any sort of use for that dude of a Smithers; why, with all his style, he can't hold a candle to our professor, and it's a shame for you to turn a man down when he's having hard luck; he's done the best work anybody ever done here, and you all know it. We're all ashamed of the way we've acted; I'm more ashamed than the rest, for I started it; it ain't his fault that the room's done bad, and we'll make it right, if you'll only let us keep him; we want to show him we've enough sense to appreciate a good thing when we see it, and he's a regular good one, I'll tell you. As for cuffs"—here he glared at his uncle as if *he* had been the offender who had started the nickname for the professor—"d' you think for a minute, Uncle Jack, that you'd find time to be so persnickety, and always wear 'em, if you had to wash dishes and wash clothes, and—and—mix dough?"

With this parting thrust at his fastidious relative, Jack Andrews, Jr., concluded his first speech in public, but it is to be hoped it will not be his last, for certainly such boldness in telling the truth without sparing one's self, would be a valuable acquisition in affairs of state.

When the boys had left the room, the members of the board stared at each other for a moment, then Dr. Andrews broke into a fit of uncontrollable

mirth that proved contagious. After this gale of merriment had swept away all formality from the meeting, they read the petition, signed by every grimy, boyish hand in the room.

A consultation followed, during which one member of the board suggested that the yielding to the request made in the petition would be establishing a bad precedent; the boys might demand the professor's promotion on through high school, but this suggestion was promptly quenched by Dr. Andrews, who proposed that it would be only fair to give the fellow another trial, and the others, having favored this plan secretly all the time, yielded gracefully.

A week later, the letter-carrier stopped at the professor's door and handed in a long, white envelope. The professor's hand trembled when he broke the seal, and he read with wondering eyes the notice of his promotion and appointment to the new position, then the petition with its many signatures fell out of the envelope into his wife's lap. They read it all over together, and she said, with a glad, sweet ring in her voice, "Oh, my dear, my dear, I knew they would appreciate your work."

The professor knelt by her chair, and laid his face in her lap to hide the tears that were rolling down his cheeks, and his invalid wife never guessed how very hard the year had been for him. And Professor Smithers never guessed how nearly he came to occupying the position still held in peace and honor by a cuffless professor.

MARY FARLEY'S FRONT.

"I just couldn't begin to tell you, Matilda, what a comfort it's been to me all these years. When things go wrong I just set down and begin to plan for it, and seems like before I know it I forget all my troubles. When I'm 'specially blue I plan for a grate. You know I don't ever expect to have that, but seems like I can just see it with a bright, sparkly fire burnin' in it of chill evenin's when I come in from my fall housecleanin', with a rockin'-chair on one side the grate, and Solomon on a cushion on t'other side. Of course, I couldn't afford the chair or the cushion either, but I just like to plan for it. Can't you just seem to see the new front now, when we look back toward the house?"

The two women were standing at a gate that opened into a trim little yard, and midway the yard stood a queer little house, just two rooms, with the roof sloping toward the back, the door set to one side to make room for the prospective front, leaving a blank space that was dismal enough to look at with all the imaginings of its cheerful owner. One of the wealthy women for whom Mary Farley worked, knowing the history of the blank wall, told her of the Italian custom of finishing the houses as best they could, then painting the front with fancy windows and stately columns to express the ideal they could not reach. Mary Farley had said laughingly: "I couldn't do that; my

blank wall wouldn't hold my ideal; and, besides, I like to change it sometimes, and if I pictured it all out with paint I couldn't do it."

She was picturing it now to her closest friend, the one who understood all the weary struggle, and knew how the plans for the new front had been made over and over, only to be laid aside again for years for the sake of some one else in trouble. The four little graves and the one long one, out in the poorer part of the cemetery, told of the apprenticeship that Mary Farley had served to Sickness and Sorrow; small wonder that she knew so well how to comfort and care for others.

"I want a small window there on the west," she continued, "and a door here on the east, with a little veranda over it and that other door, and in front I want one of them great, big windows to let in the south light, so's I can have plants in the winter. I've always heard, count a hundred dollars to the room, and I've saved eighty-nine dollars and sixty-five cents; got it in the savings-bank this minute. I just get real excited when I think how near I am to it; seems like it's just too good to be true."

"Well, you deserve it, just as nice a room as ever was built, if ever anybody deserved anything," was her neighbor's warm reply, as they separated for the night.

The next day, Mary Farley called to her neighbor across the back fence: "I've had a letter, Matilda, and Aunt Sophiar out in Illinoy has fell and broke her hip, and they've sent for me to come and nurse her. The letter had laid in the post-office a

week; I don't go often, not expectin' anything, so I've got to get ready and start to-day."

Matilda Brown bustled over to help her neighbor get ready: she had pressed out the one best dress and was helping to pack a few things in the valise, but paused to ask suddenly, with well-meant inquisitiveness: "How much did they send you to come on, Mary?"

Mary Farley started, and her face flushed as she answered slowly: "They didn't send anything, Matilda; they're awful hard run and they couldn't. I've—I've got enough to take me there and back, and buy the things she'll need while she has to lay there, pore old dear."

"You don't mean that you'll use the money again—that you've saved for your front?" Matilda Brown gasped.

"Yes, it will have to go; now, don't you say a word. Aunt Sophiar raised me and done the best she could by me, and I don't begrudge her a cent of it, but I've give up my front forever. I'll have to stay out there a good long spell, and that will lose me all my washings; then it will be too late when I get back to get any of the fall house-cleanin's to do, and, besides, I'm gettin' too old to ever work again like I have done, and it took a long time to save it this last time."

She turned toward the glass and tied her bonnet on hurriedly, as if afraid that her courage might fail her after all. Matilda Brown wiped her eyes vigorously on her apron as she stood with her back to her friend; she did not try to argue the case; she had known Mary Farley too long. She

gathered up the valise and carried it out to the gate. Mary Farley locked her door and gave the key into her friend's keeping, then, shaking hands, they parted.

Mary Farley went slowly down the street, stopping at every gate to say good-by to the neighbors who came out to see her off. One child offered to take her valise to the station in his express wagon, and a half-dozen others almost fought for the privilege of helping draw it. The men coming from their work stopped for a word with her, and it was the sight of the men in their working-clothes, carrying their tools, that put a sudden bright idea into Matilda Brown's head. She watched until Mary Farley was out of sight, then, hastening down the street, asked at every house for the people to come to Mary Farley's front yard after supper, for she had something important to talk over with them.

They came in a wondering crowd, these hard-working men and women, filling the little yard full, and Matilda Brown's courage almost failed her, but she swallowed the lump in her throat and began by saying:

"Neighbors, you all know how Mary Farley's been lookin' forward to buildin' a front to her house, all these years."

Her hearers nodded eagerly.

"Well," she continued, "she's give it up."

A look of consternation spread over the faces in her audience.

"You all know how many times it's been postponed, and why; she's used the money time and

again to help others in trouble and sickness. A big part of us owes our lives and our happiness to her. They's not a fam'ly here that has not turned to her for help at some time, and she never failed you. She's used the money this time to take her out to that aunt of hers, and to buy the things her aunt will need, and she says she's too old to ever try to raise the hundred again. Now I want to tell you my idee. We're goin' to build that front for Mary Farley, to show her that we appreciate what she has done for us, and we must have it done when she comes home in the fall. We've not got much money, any of us, but there's hours of time we can give, and we'll do it, won't we, neighbors?"

A hearty chorus of approval closed this speech, the first and last public speech ever made by Matilda Brown.

It was a busy summer that followed, the men working after hours, and the women helping with encouraging words. There was less quarreling than ever before on that street, for all their interests centered in the little front room. The people vied with each other in their donations of building material, and spent many an evening planning the work to make it all come out to the best advantage.

Jack Brown, the stalwart carpenter, remembered the time when he had lain for weeks with a broken limb, and the money saved for the front had helped them through. He had always meant to pay it back some time, but with so many mouths to fill it was hard work to have anything left over to pay old debts. He worked early and late now, putting up the frame of the front room, and he said that he

never drove nails in timber with such relish in his life before.

Bill Smook, the plasterer, did the best work of his life in finishing the snowy walls, remembering the time when his wife had been nursed back to life by Mary Farley's gentle hands after the physicians had said that there was no hope.

Every one of them had some part in the work, and it was the happiest time in all their pinched, hard-worked lives when the little room stood complete, with its big south window, and, best of all, a grate to hold the sparkly fire of cold evenings.

There came a surprise for them all when a dray stopped at the gate one day, and the drayman carried in a bright, new carpet, a center-table and a beautiful rocking-chair. They had not dreamed of furnishing the room, but Dick Johnson had. Dick was one of the causes of the postponement. He had been a delicate boy, a great one for books, the neighbors said, not able to do rough work like the other boys, so the money saved for the front had given him a course in a business college and now he held a good position downtown. He had paid the money back long ago, and it had gone to help some one else, but this donation was part payment of his debt of gratitude, Dick said.

The women made the carpet and tacked it on the floor, with never an envious feeling at thought of their own bare floors. The children saved their pennies until they had enough to buy a big, bright picture for the wall. Matilda Brown's little crippled girl pieced a wonderful cushion out of bits of all their dresses, and the children filled it with

feathers and bits of excelsior they found. When it was finished, they placed it by the grate for Solomon, the big black cat, who boarded 'round while his mistress was away.

At last it was all done, and they waited impatiently for Mary Farley's home-coming; then at last, when the letter came saying that she would come on a certain day, they began to wonder how they would present the front. They decided finally on a letter, to be written and placed on the center-table, and Matilda Brown was appointed to write it. She labored over it earnestly until she had completed the following:

This front is give to you in return for and appreciation of all past kindnesses.

YOUR GRATEFUL NEIGHBORS.

P. S.—Dick give the carpet and the chair and the table, and the children give the picture and cushion.

This letter was considered a masterpiece, in spite of the fact that it was written on coarse paper, and written with some of the contents of Matilda's bluing-bottle. Jack Brown was especially proud of the fact that his wife had written it. "It's short, and to the point, so's she can sense it all at once," he said. The letter was placed on the table, and they decided to keep close at home until she had time to read it, then flock in to enjoy the surprise. The evening was chill and gloomy, so a bright fire was kindled in the grate, and the rocking-chair drawn invitingly near, with Solomon snuggled down on his cushion on the other side. They hurried home as it neared traintime, then occupied the time by pulling inquisitive children down from the windows.

Mary Farley stepped from the train and looked for some familiar face, but there was none in sight. She sighed, and, picking up her valise, trudged wearily toward the other side of town. As she came out on the narrow, familiar street, no one greeted her; the doors were all closed, and the dull ache around her heart almost smothered her. She had been forgotten so soon after all her sacrifices, she thought bitterly, as she walked with bowed head to her little gate.

She raised the latch, then uttered one startled exclamation, and stood for a moment as if in a dream. She went up the walk to the neat little veranda, then opened the door.

The fire in the grate crackled a welcome, and Solomon, rising sedately, bowed his back in a semi-circle, then, with a yawn, settled back comfortably on his cushion.

She set the valise down and stood looking around the room, then, seeing the letter on the center-table, she fumbled in her pocket for her glasses, and read the letter over and over until at last the meaning of it dawned on her bewildered brain.

The neighbors crept noiselessly up to look in at the big south window, then crept noiselessly back again, for they saw her kneeling with clasped hands in front of the little grate, and on her uplifted face was a light that had never shone there before, the light that comes from the realization of cherished hopes, after years of self-denial, sacrifice and patient endurance.

THE LOYALTY OF NUMBER THIRTEEN.

"It's a shame," said the little woman; "yes," she repeated, "it's a burning shame." The little woman was acting as clerk in the hat and cap department of the rummage sale, and she held in her hands a dusty cap that some former graduate of the college had contributed to the sale.

It was early morning, and she was talking to herself, for the clerks of the various departments had not yet arrived.

"How could he be so disloyal," she said, indignantly, "when I would have given half my life for the privilege of wearing one for the year, and then keeping it as my most treasured possession for the remainder of my life, but I couldn't do it. I don't see how he could throw it away." The little woman brushed away a tear, for she loved the dear, old college, in which she had passed one busy, happy year, better perhaps than many who had carried away diplomas.

The cap was turned and tossed about in the box during the week, but no one thought of purchasing it, and the little woman watched it with a bitter look in her brown eyes.

The last day of the sale came, and the hat and cap department was being rapidly closed out. A

small bootblack stood turning over the stock with a disappointed look on his face.

There were stiff hats and slouch hats, but no caps for a boy of his size. Suddenly the little woman picked up the mortar-board and clapped it on his head. "How would you like that for a penny?" she asked.

The boy took it off and eyed it critically. If he bought this one, he would have four cents of his nickel left.

He looked at the nickel, then at the cap, hesitated a moment, then said in an apologetic tone, "I don't think I'd like that style, ma'am; boys like me don't wear 'em, and them college chaps would guy me, you know."

A bright thought came to the little woman. She would put the man to shame who had shown such disloyalty.

"I'll give you a quarter if you'll take it and wear it all the time until it is worn out, and if any of those college boys laugh at you, tell them that you have a better right to wear it than the one who threw it away ever had."

The boy nodded eager assent, put the cap on hurriedly, and reached for the quarter. Such a bargain was unheard of, even at a rummage sale.

The little fellow was a conspicuous object on the streets, and attracted much attention during the days that followed.

A tall, broad-shouldered young man stopped one morning for a shine, and, eyeing the cap, asked mischievously, "When did you enter the Senior class?"

The boy's face flushed, then, remembering his promise, he answered, boldly, "The little woman that gim'me this cap said if any you fellers tried to guy me, for me to tell you that I had more right to wear it than the feller that throwed it away ever did have, so there."

The twinkle in the young man's eyes died out, and, holding out his hand, he said gravely, "Shake. You and the lady are right, and if any one else tries to guy you, I'll stand by you."

The young professor kept his promise so well that the Senior class changed their taunting remarks to merry greetings, and these the bootblack did not mind. And let me whisper a secret here, a secret that the young professor never told—the cap had once graced his own handsome blonde head.

There were twelve members of the graduating class, and one of them dubbed the little bootblack "Number Thirteen," when he first appeared in the mortar-board. The name took hold, as college nicknames have a trick of doing, until he was soon known to all the college people by that title.

When he met the little woman he always lifted the cap in delight, and when she stopped for a moment's chat with him she always left him with the feeling that the sun was shining and birds singing, no matter how dismal the day.

He watched for her, waited for her and almost worshiped her, the only well-dressed woman who had ever taken the trouble to treat him as if he was already the gentleman he sometime meant to be.

When the annual class fight between the Seniors and Juniors came on, "Number Thirteen" caught

the spirit of it, and the little woman found him one day holding down a bootblack larger than himself (who had been infringing on his territory), pounding him severely and saying, "You're an old Junior, that's what you are, an' us Seniors 'll make the town hot for you."

He looked up to find the brown eyes watching him with disapproval in their depths. "Do you think that is the way to be loyal to your college?" she asked, sadly. "I didn't think you would do such a thing in the name of the college. I had such hopes of you; I thought you would work hard, and I would help you all I could, and sometime you would be ready to enter the college and work your way up until some day you could wear a Senior cap that you had won by your work. You're not going to be just a common scrub boy getting into street brawls like this, dishonoring the cap I gave you? You're not going to disappoint all my plans for you? You *will* try to be the noble man it is possible for you to be, won't you?"

She held out her hand to him. He placed his own rough little hand in hers, and, looking up at the tall college building, he answered her appeal in an awed tone, "I'll try it, ma'am, I sure will."

Looking into his wide-open, honest eyes, the little woman believed him.

From that day a new ambition took possession of "Number Thirteen." He went to the little woman's home of evenings, and she helped him with his lessons patiently, kindly remembering all the disadvantages against which he would have to battle. He would look at the college walls with loving eyes.

It was his college; he would be a student there some day, and grow wise and good. Then he could wear a shiny new cap, a cap that fit. The little woman said so, and the little woman knew.

In the meantime he worked faithfully for his class and his beloved professor, the young professor who always stopped to shake hands, no matter where they met. He gave their shoes the brightest shines it was possible for him to give, and followed them with an admiration and devotion that was poorly repaid. His dislike for the Juniors grew stronger as time passed, for the tantalizing fellows made life a burden to him, with their taunts and jeers.

One morning when "Number Thirteen" shouldered his kit and started toward the college end of town he happened to glance up, and there, floating defiantly from the belfry, was the Junior flag. His breath came hard as he eyed it. What right had it there when only yesterday he had heard two members of his own class discussing the possibilities of being able to place their flag there?

He glanced critically at the structure of the belfry and tower above it. His face lighted with a happy thought, and he started to find his favorite Senior, to whom he confided his secret. The Senior looked doubtful, then hopeful, and finally joyful, as the plan was unfolded to him in detail.

In the gray dawn of the next morning, when the Juniors had retired from their watch, exultant over the Seniors' seeming hopelessness and defeat, a tiny figure climbed out past the belfry, up the side of the tower, creeping carefully from one jutting orna-

ment to another, up where no one but his tiny self could climb, then planted the Senior flag many feet higher than the Juniors'.

The Seniors held their breath when he turned for the descent, but he came down slowly, cautiously, to the trap-door, where they could grasp him in their arms. Then how they praised him, carrying him on their shoulders, and making much of him in general.

Finally one of them asked, "Why didn't you bring down the Junior flag? Did you forget it, or were you afraid?"

"Furgit! Afraid!" he ejaculated, scornfully; "course not; I jest wanted them Juniors to see how high we was above 'em."

Then how they cheered him, until the Juniors came running to see what had caused the outburst, and beheld with chagrin the Senior flag, floating triumphantly far above their own.

That day the Senior class decided that they needed a mascot, and when the class picture was taken, there in the center was "Number Thirteen," with the big, white figures fastened on his shabby coat, and a satisfied smile on his face.

Commencement week rolled around, and "Number Thirteen" looked forward with dismal forebodings to the time when his class would leave the college town, for they had built up a good trade for him, besides showing him many favors, such as saving choice bits from their banquets, and giving him free tickets to the football games, where he stood up and yelled with all his small strength, or huddled down a forlorn little heap on the bleach-

ers, according to the success or failure of his beloved college.

The early summer had been dry and sultry, and the little face under the mortar-board was brown from the sun's scorching rays, but the Seniors congratulated themselves on the fact that the face had broadened, and the little form was growing plumper, and a happier light shone from the gray eyes, since they had adopted him as a member of the class.

As "Number Thirteen" was sauntering sadly down the street the day before Commencement, his quick ears heard the crackle and snap of fire, and, looking up, he saw tongues of flame just creeping through the roof of the dormitory. He turned and ran toward the main part of town, crying "Fire!" with all his might. When he reached the little one-horse fire department quarters, he hurried them with his almost breathless excitement into making quicker time than they had ever been known to make. He climbed up on the back of the wagon, and went with them in the wild race to the dormitory, but the huge building was already wrapped in flames, and the firemen saw that their efforts would be useless in trying to save it. But the fire must be stayed, or it would spread to the buildings near.

Particles of the burning building were hurled high in the air by the force of the heat, and were lodging here and there. A burning brand flew high above the building, was caught by a gust of wind and carried up, up, then lodged on the college tower. It smouldered awhile, then caught in some

dry leaves that had been carried to the crevice by autumn winds, and a tiny red flame shot up toward the open slats and carved work of the tower.

A pair of keen, gray eyes saw it, and a shrill scream brought the attention of many eyes, but when the firemen turned the stream of water toward the college building a cry of distress went up, for the stream would not reach the tower. The water was failing, and the pressure was not strong enough to carry it so high. The pair of gray eyes measured the distance. The fire was just above where he had planted the Senior flag. He had reached it once; he could do it again.

Again and again the firemen turned the stream toward the fire. It could not reach the little flame, growing bolder in its freedom. Then the crowd watching below saw a tiny figure creep out through the belfry on up the side of the tower, while they stood in awful suspense. For a second he paused—was he afraid? would he fail? Ah, it was his cap slipping from his head. Holding with one hand, he removed it and caught it in his teeth. Then up again, to the place where he had planted the flag.

Placing his feet firmly in the openings of the ornamental work, and grasping with his left hand a slight projection above, he lifted the burning brand with his right hand, and flung it far out from the building. Then, taking his cap, he fought the little flame, beating and buffeting it until it stopped blazing, smoldered sullenly for a little while, then died out.

He watched it for a moment to be sure it was quite gone, then, taking his cap in his teeth, he

started slowly on his descent. A loud cheer went up from the crowd. Then they watched breathlessly while he crept slowly down. When he reached the trap-door strong arms caught him and carried him down to the waiting crowd.

The battered cap was caught out of his hands, passed through the crowd, and brought back to him filled with coins and bills. When the young professor had explained to "Number Thirteen" that it was all for him, he cried excitedly, "It'll help to take me through my college; you keep it for me," and he poured it all into the professor's hat. Then, looking at his torn and broken cap, he said with a sob, "But I've ruined my cap, an' I promised the little woman I'd wear it an' try to be an honor to it, 'cause she couldn't ever wear one. I had to save my college, but I've ruined my cap, an' what d' you reckon she'll think?"

A little woman pushed her way through the crowd to his side, and said brokenly, "I think—I think—" then, sobbing, she raised the little, burned hand, and kissed it tenderly, and the crowd, guessing her thought, sent up another rousing cheer for "Number Thirteen."

AS STARS IN THEIR PLACES.

CHAPTER I.

"Come up, Dan De, we'll have to be joggin' on, so we can tell our Hettie the good news. It's good news for Hettie, old boy, but bad times it's going to be for you and me with our Hettie away from home. I feel juberos about lettin' her go, Dan De. I'm afraid it'll change her sweet ways. Mis' Talbot and the perfessor thinks she'd better get out from home and finish up her edjucation, for fear they are not quite up to date in their teachin'. We're not a-goin' to be selfish enough to keep her from havin' advantages, just because we couldn't have 'em, are we? Come up, I say."

The speaker was a rosy-faced, white-haired man, of middle age, seated in a covered wagon, and Dan De, to whom the remarks were addressed, was the large, rawboned, gray horse harnessed to the wagon. They had been resting under the shade of a big oak-tree by the side of the pike.

Dan De waited to be admonished for the third time, to "come up." He switched his tail lazily at a fly that buzzed aimlessly in the hot July sunshine, then, drawing the wagon out to the center of the pike, proceeded to jog on.

Hiram Hinkle, huckster, sat with bowed head and thoughtful expression. He held the lines, but Dan De was master of the situation, and took his

own gait. It grew late, and the sun, sinking behind the heavy fringe of timber that skirted the road on the western side, threw back such ardent glances along the sky, that the glory of it was enough to have aroused Hiram Hinkle from his gloomy thoughts; but he sat with eyes downcast, while Dan De plodded lazily on, and the lovely sunset was wasted on the two.

The colors faded in a dingy brown in the west, a katydid called shrilly from the meadow, and was answered by its mate in contradictory tone.

Hiram Hinkle roused at the sound, and said aloud: "Dan De, do you hear that? There'll be frost in six weeks; that'll be by the middle of September. Winter's goin' to begin early, and it'll be a long one for us, old feller."

When they came in sight of the little village of Brandt's Crossing, the old man straightened himself, and, rubbing his hand over his smooth, ruddy face, said severely to his horse: "Look here, sir; don't you let on that we're feeling bad over this, not a bit of it, you hear me? If our Hettie knew we was takin' it to heart this way, she wouldn't go a step, and we want her to go and have a better chance in the world than we had, don't we?"

For answer, Dan De quickened his pace, and, turning the corner at the crossing of the roads where stood Brandt's grocery, dry-goods store and post-office combined, he went up the slope of hill to the last house in the little town. The little white cottage stood aloof from the straggling row of unpainted houses that bordered the country road on each side leading down to the crossing.

Dan De turned in at the gate of a large yard. The young girl who had opened the gate closed it quickly, and came running to be almost smothered by the fervent embrace of the huckster, who had climbed down from the wagon.

Dan De whinnied for a share of the welcome, and the girl patted his soft, gray chin, while her father removed the harness. She was talking all the time, asking questions by the dozen in an eager way, until her father laughingly called a halt, saying she did not give him time to answer.

She ran into the house, calling back that she would have supper ready by the time he had fed and watered Dan De. "I am going to get supper by myself," she said, "for Aunt Martha has gone to stay overnight with Melissa Holt's sick baby."

Hiram Hinkle was hungry, after the long drive, and the dainty supper, with his cup of hot tea, rested him, and he was soon talking gaily. He told the girl how well the butter sold, how the chickens sold a half cent higher on the pound than he had expected, and how Dan De backed his ears at the electric cars as they whizzed by, but never once scared at anything.

After they had taken the lamp into the sitting-room, he talked on every subject he could think of, except the one that lay heaviest on his mind. He sat nervously on the edge of his favorite arm-chair, looking intently at her awhile, then said abruptly: "Hettie, I drove out to the college town to-day, and went to see the head boss of the college. I asked a man where his house was, and I knocked pretty loud, and his wife come to the door. I reckon it

was his wife; she was peaked-lookin' like she had been brought up on book learnin' and hadn't had much nourishment since.

"I said to her, 'I'd like to see your husband,' and she told me that I would find him at his office, and started to shut the door, but I says, 'Hold on a minute; I don't know where his office is.'

"She pointed over toward the big college building, and told me to go in at one side, and just before I come out on the other side I'd see a door with 'President's Office' on it, and for me to turn in there. I couldn't see for the life of me why I couldn't 'a' gone in at the side that was close to the door, but I reckon that's ag'inst college rules. I found the place all right, and when I knocked, a little bit of a feller come to the door.

"I asked him if I could see the head boss of the college, and he kind of laughed, and says, 'Step in; I guess I'm the man you want to see.'

"I never was so took aback. He didn't look big enough to run a deestricht school, but he talked sharp, and he had a real knowin' look out of his eyes. He spoke well of Perfessor Earle and said you could go to college if you could pass the examination all right. He said where they entered one of the higher classes without previous work at the college, they made the examination pretty rigid. It sounded like it might be pretty tough to get through, the way he said 'pretty rigid,' with that knowin' shake of his head, but I told him that I thought you could do it. He said he thought they would be a chance for you to work for your board

at one of the clubs, if I could pay your tuition, so I told him I'd bring you when school started up."

He had told her all this hurriedly, as if he feared that his courage would fail. He had tried to make it sound cheerful and like his usual jocular self. The girl listened, her eyes wide with surprise.

When he had finished, she exclaimed: "O father, I never dreamed of going now. I intended to teach some time, and make my own way. How can you spare me, and how can you pay the tuition?"

He had expected such an outburst, and was prepared. He made a chuckling noise that passed for a laugh as he answered: "Now, I reckon I thought that problem all out beforehand. I've saved up some money along, and it don't take much to keep me and Dan De. I can pay your tuition just as well as not, and I'd love awful well to pay your board so you wouldn't have to work, but I ain't got quite enough. The perfessor said that lots of folks had worked their way through and been well thought of too. I've always aimed for you to go sometime. Your mother used to say that she wanted you to have a chance to be what she had wanted to be. You know how I always told you she wanted an edjucation. Your mother would want you to make the most of this chance, and as for sparin' you"—he cleared his throat, then he tried to make a joke of it—"I guess we can spare you all right. Your Aunt Martha can cook good meals, and clear out the dirt, and, besides, we're not here much, me and Dan De; we're mostly on the road. So it's all settled, and you are a-goin'!"

Hettie saw the effort her father was making to

keep up, and knew that of all things he detested a scene, so she thanked him quietly, kissed him, and, taking her lamp, went to her room for the night. She went to bed, but not to sleep. Through the long night she lay looking out of her window, where the moonlight shone brightly, and the trees threw quaint shadows on the ground. She thought of all the years of loving, patient care her father had given her. Aunt Martha had seen that the little, motherless girl was comfortably clothed and well fed, but father had been her all in all—father, teacher, playmate, everything to her—until she had started to school. How proud he had been of her progress as she passed from one year to another, until she had finished her work in the common schools; then her new friends had come.

Professor Earle, whose health had failed, making teaching impossible, had bought a small farm and moved near Brandt's Crossing, to try the effect of country air. He and his good wife had taken to Hettie from the first, because of a fancied resemblance to their only daughter, who had died years before.

Then the doctor's wife had come. Dr. Talbot, through some misfortune or from his own lack of character, had lost his practice in the city and had come to Brandt's Crossing. The people of the surrounding country soon learned to respect his skill, and as he was the only physician near, they closed their eyes to his faults. He always managed to keep sober when he had any serious case on hand, and in a few years had built up a good practice here.

The doctor's wife was a lady—every one acknowledged that at first sight—a lady in the truest sense of the word; gracious and kindly toward all the village people; but Hettie was her one close friend. They had been drawn toward each other because they were so different from their surroundings.

Hettie wondered, as she lay thinking of the past, what life would have been like without Professor Earle and Mrs. Talbot. They had understood her longing for an education, and had helped her, lending her books and hearing her recite until they felt that she had gone as far as they were able to guide her. They decided that she needed the polishing that comes from contact with college life, a something that could not be obtained at Brandt's Crossing. They had talked it all over with her father, and he had arranged for her to go.

Hettie would feel tumultuously happy for a time, then the thought of leaving her father would come, making her ashamed of her joy; but toward morning the memory of all that her father had said of her mother's ambition and hope for her, came, bringing strong argument in favor of going. She arose early and prepared the breakfast.

Her father looked worn and tired, as if he, too, had passed a sleepless night; but they made a merry meal together, and Hettie was hurrying to finish the morning work that she might go to tell Professor Earle and Mrs. Talbot of her good news, when Aunt Martha came home.

Aunt Martha was Hiram Hinkle's maiden sister. Dear Aunt Martha, in her plain calico dress, with its straight, full skirt and spencer waist, her gray

hair parted in V-shape on top of her head and the fore tops rolled smoothly back behind her ears.

There are no words to describe her. She was just Aunt Martha, loved and feared by all who knew her, for her bright eyes were quick to detect the failings of others, and her kindly hands were ever ready to help in time of need. Perhaps Hettie's was the only love unmixed with fear that she had ever known.

Hettie dropped her dish towel, and caught the prim old lady in an embrace that almost lifted her off her feet, as she came into the kitchen, telling her the news, expecting to have to meet numberless objections, but, to her surprise, Aunt Martha quietly took up her knitting.

Hettie felt disappointed, for, after making up one's mind to argue, it is easier to argue than to be ignored. After awhile, she said: "Don't you want me to go, Aunt Martha? Don't you believe I ought to try to get an education?"

Aunt Martha knit several rounds, making the needles click decisively. She often did this before answering a question. Once when a child, Hettie had asked her father if Aunt Martha had to think with her needles. When she laid the knitting down and looked up, she answered tersely: "I believe in education for some, and some I don't, and I don't know which ones I believe in it for till I see it tried on 'em;" then, picking up her work, she said: "Now run along and tell Mis' Talbot; I reckon you're just a-dyin to tell her," and, without further bidding, Hettie went.

CHAPTER II.

Hettie found Mrs. Talbot as enthusiastic over the change as she had expected, although she dreaded the parting from her bright young friend, and felt that Brandt's Crossing would be a dreary place without her.

They talked of her college work for a time, then Hettie went to tell the news to Mollie Parr, the village dressmaker, who had made all of her best dresses, planning and skimping to make the most of the scanty wardrobe, and loving the sweet girl as if she had been her very own.

Mollie Parr had been a pretty girl, but life had been a hard struggle for her. Few people remembered her as she had been in her youth, and now she was a faded, nervous little woman, grown old before her time.

When Hettie entered the sewing-room she called out gaily: "Oh, Miss Mollie, I'm going to college, and you promised to help me get ready whenever my chance came."

Miss Mollie dropped the lap full of ruffling, and, reaching up, kissed the tall girl on each cheek, then she choked back a sob as she said: "I'm glad you got your heart's desire, Hettie, and I'll do all in my power to help you get ready."

They sat for an hour planning for the clothes Hettie would need. Miss Mollie thought that the black skirt could be ripped and pressed to make it presentable, and with several shirt waists would do until winter; then there was the red dress she

had outgrown, and the old green skirt that would make waists for winter. "But, O Hettie," she exclaimed, "you must have an evening dress for them big receptions. I've been reading lots about them, and it won't do to wear your school dresses to them, and I've just thought about your mother's wedding dress. I know it's good and full, for I made it, and I could get one any way we wanted it."

Hettie answered slowly: "Oh, I just couldn't take it; I won't need an evening dress, for I'll not be likely to get an invitation."

"Oh, yes, you will," Miss Mollie insisted, "and you know she'd want you to go, and want you to look pretty, too, and your father will want you to have it, so I'll look over my fashion plates this evening and pick out a style that will suit you."

When all their plans had been made, Hettie went to see Professor Earle. She found him in his garden, but he dropped his hoe and listened with pleasure to Hettie's plans for the future.

After she had left the professor's house she felt that she would like to be alone for awhile to think of her wonderful good fortune. So, instead of going back through the village, she turned into the river road. The huge trees reached friendly arms to each other across the road, making an arch that was cool and quiet. She could catch glimpses of the river running quietly along, except where it caught at the roots of the trees, and broke into a merry gurgle at its own pranks. When she came to the bridge she stopped to look down the stream.

She was wishing she could see John Hart, and

tell him of her good luck. John would be so glad. She could not remember when she had first known John. They had played together, studied together at school, and finished the common school course the same year. Then they had studied together and recited their lessons to Professor Earle in the long winter evenings, always planning to go to college when the opportunity came.

John's mother was dead, too, and his father had been a huckster, but his health had failed, and John had put by his hopes for a better education, rented the little farm to a family who would care for his father, and, taking his father's place on the road, was making a comfortable living for both, but with no hope of going away to the life he longed for.

Hettie was sorry for John, but then he was a man, and men could make their opportunities, while girls had to wait for opportunity to come to them.

She stood humming the old song, "The Bend of the River," when suddenly two warm hands were clasped over her eyes, a hearty voice joined in the chorus, then cried out, "Guess who?"

"Take your hands off my eyes, John," she answered; then, as he released her, she turned to face the broad-shouldered young fellow, saying laughingly: "As if I wouldn't recognize your stentorian voice anywhere. Guess what I was thinking of, John?"

"I couldn't," he answered promptly.

"I was thinking of the time when we used to come here fishing, and we were always planning to some day go beyond the bend of the river, and see

what was on the other side, and now—O John, I am going beyond the bend. I'm going to college at last."

She looked squarely into his handsome, sun-burned face (for she was almost as tall as he), and read the look of sorrow and disappointment written so plainly there. She stood quite still for a moment, then cried out: "O John, you're not glad, when you know I have longed for a chance in the world, and we had been friends so long."

He turned from her reproachful eyes, and looked down the shining stretch of water as he answered slowly: "Don't talk as if we were not to be friends any more. I'll try to be glad, but it isn't what we had planned. You are going around the bend, and I am left behind. I'm not begrudging you your chance, Hettie, but I couldn't help feeling disappointed that you could go on, while I must stop here, and never know of the life beyond the bend."

Hettie held out her hand, saying, "I'm sorry I was cross, John, but don't give up all hope; your chance will come some day."

It is so easy to see the bright side of other people's clouds. Hettie said good-by, and hurried toward home, singing as she went, but John stood still on the bridge, his heart filled with a bitter feeling of rebellion toward the fate that had chained him to the life of drudgery.

Hettie worked diligently through the hot August days, for there was so much to be done before she went away. She tried to think of all the little things that would add to her father's comfort, the little things that Aunt Martha thought foolishness.

In the long afternoons she sat with Miss Mollie, patiently ripping, turning and pressing the old clothes, to make them look like new. Her father had insisted on having the mother's wedding dress made over for her, and Miss Mollie had fashioned from it a lovely evening dress, but, to her grief, Hettie would not allow her to cut it low in the neck, or make it without sleeves. Miss Mollie argued that evening dresses were always made that way, but Hettie would not be convinced, so they compromised by having it just come to the slender throat and the sleeves to the elbow, finishing both neck and sleeves with the soft lace ruffles her mother had worn on her wedding-day. When she tried the dress on for the last time, Miss Mollie seemed more nervous than usual.

She asked Hettie to stand in front of the long mirror, then, drawing a box from the closet shelf, she lifted out an opera cape of silvery gray eider-down, lined with rich red satin. She threw it over Hettie's shoulders, and as the girl turned toward her with an exclamation of surprise, she sank into her little sewing-chair and clasped her hands in delight.

"Oh, I'm so glad I had it," she said excitedly. "I had never told any one about it. Once when I was in the city I got extravagant, and bought it. I never had bought anything in my life before that I didn't just need. It was money one of my uncles gave to me, and I had a right to spend it any way I wanted to, and it's been such a comfort to me. Sometimes of a night when I felt lonesome and all out of sorts, I'd put it 'round me, and turn the

soft collar up around my face, and it would take the tired feeling all away, and sometimes when I've been real hurried I'd just reach in the box and smooth it. I've given up ever having a chance to be like other folks now, but I've taken so much pleasure in thinking how pretty it would look over your gray gown; it just gives it the right finish, and it's yours."

Hettie sank down in a gray heap by the little rocker, almost smothering the little dressmaker with her embraces, as she cried out: "Oh, Miss Mollie, I can't take it, when it's all the pretty thing you ever had."

"There, there, get up before you muss your dress," said Miss Mollie; then, clasping Hettie closely, she said brokenly: "If it was in my power, I'd give you every good thing this old world holds, and you shan't spoil my pleasure by refusing my one little gift."

So the opera cape was packed in the trunk with the evening dress.

When it came to saying good-by to the old friends, Hettie found it hard work. Professor Earle and Mrs. Talbot spoke helpful words of encouragement, and Miss Mollie held her closely and sobbed out her blessing.

Aunt Martha, who felt doubtful of the propriety of sending a girl away by herself, warned her of the dangers that would beset her path, telling her solemnly that she wanted her to remember how she had tried to raise her right, and matter-of-fact Hettie laid her head on the motherly breast, and sobbed out her love for her. The unexpected

action nearly took the good woman's breath, but the next moment Hettie had dried her tears and was begging her to be good to father, and write to her immediately if he was sick or needed her.

Aunt Martha sniffed scornfully as she said: "I guess I don't have to be told to be good to my own brother, and I guess if he was sick I could take about as good care of him as you could."

When it came to telling John Hart good-by, Hettie was puzzled by his manner. He clasped her hand close for a minute, then turned abruptly away, without any of the kindly wishes for the future that her other friends had given so freely. Hettie climbed up beside her father in the huckster wagon. Dan De trotted out of the yard and down through the little village, where the neighbors were waiting at their gates to wave a last good-by to her.

The platform of the little village store was filled with the usual number of loafers, and after the wagon had rattled out of sight, one gray-haired man changed his quid of tobacco to the other cheek and remarked: "I 'low Hiram's made a bad move, sendin' Hettie away to get more larnin'. She'll come back high-headed and uppish, and Brandt's Crossing won't be good enough for her."

The other loafers shook their heads solemnly over the bad move, and went on with their whittling.

CHAPTER III.

It was the first day of the fall term at Delmar College. Students were gathered in groups in the lower halls, where the great doors swung wide and the warm September breeze swept pleasantly through.

The boys were telling each other of the long tramps across country, or trips made with their wheels during the vacation. Some few earnest-minded ones were comparing the work they had done. The girls chatted merrily of the summer gaieties.

One group of girls near the door seemed especially merry, all talking at once to a tall, beautiful girl, around whom they gathered, as bees around a flower. It could be plainly seen that she was a leader and these her adoring subjects. In the midst of a peal of laughter brought forth by one of her bright sayings, a plainly dressed girl passed by them, going through the door and down the walk. Before she was out of hearing, one of the girls poised lightly on the lower step of the stairway called out gaily to the girl in the center of the group: "I say, Dell Duncan, there's a new girl for you; you have such a penchant for making things agreeable for strangers. I just wish you could have seen her arrival. It was the richest thing I ever saw. She and an old man, whom I suppose was the father, drove up to the Brady Club-house, in a covered wagon drawn by one old gray horse. They took out a trunk just one size larger than a

shoe-box, and the old man carried it in at the kitchen door, and the girl followed him."

Then a black-eyed, mischievous-looking girl said: "I saw her over at Professor Rice's room, when she registered. Professor Rice adjusted his glasses and said in his most courteous way, 'Your name, please,' and she answered, 'Hester Hinkle.' Then he said, 'Your father's name and occupation,' and she said, 'Hiram Hinkle, huckster.' It sounded so ridiculous I couldn't keep my face straight, and Professor Rice saw me and said, 'I believe you have registered, Miss Brown; will you please make room for others?' The names made me think of a nursery jingle."

The other girls laughed, but if they had expected Dell Duncan to laugh, they were disappointed. She gave them a withering glance of disapproval as she said: "Lou Martin and Mim Brown, why will you persist in trying to make a new girl miserable here? You wouldn't treat the humblest guest rudely at your homes, and this is our home while we are here. I'm ashamed of you, talking so that poor girl could hear you. I only wish that I had half the ability to help strangers that you give me credit for."

She walked away, leaving the girls looking blankly at each other.

Lou Martin broke the silence by saying: "Well, if it wasn't Dell, I'd be put out over such a lecture, but she is such a dear when she is sweet, one just has to put up with her bad spells;" but Mim Brown tossed her short black curls and retorted: "I'll be put out over it if it is Dell Duncan, and I'll see if

she brings into our select circle the daughter of Hiram Hinkle, huckster."

The other girls laughed at this, then went to their rooms to get ready for the morrow's work.

When Dell Duncan left the girls, she went directly to the Brady house, where she had her room. She started up the stairway and met Mrs. Brady, manager of the club. She stopped to ask impulsively: "Can you tell me where Miss Hinkle's room is?"

Mrs. Brady studied for a moment, then answered: "Oh, you mean the new dining-room girl. She has the little room next the kitchen, that opens out of the dining-room. She's going to wait on the table and help with the dishes for her room and board. I guess it was all her father could do to pay her tuition, and I thought I would give her a chance to earn her board."

Mrs. Brady went on down the stairway with a complacent look on her fat face. Dell shook one white fist at the broad back, saying to herself: "Trying to give the impression that she has done a charitable thing, when she knows she will get enough work out of that poor girl to pay her board twice over."

She turned and ran lightly down the stairway, through the lower hall, and across the dining-room, then tapped at the door next the kitchen. She expected it to be opened by a girl with eyes red and swollen from a hard cry. They usually did that after the first snubbing the girls gave them, but she was confronted by a very erect young lady, with a very white face, and an ominous light in

her dark eyes. The girl looked surprised when Dell stepped into the little room, then she asked coldly: "Why did you follow me? Did you think I could not hear what the girls said about me in the hall? Did you come to see the shoe-box trunk? It is over there in the corner, but the wagon and horse and my father have gone."

Then her spirit of defiance left her, and she dropped down weak and trembling on the little trunk.

Dell Duncan looked at her in amazement for a moment, this outburst was so different from anything she had ever encountered, then she dropped on her knees by the side of the trunk, and, putting both arms around the girl, said gently: "What made you think such dreadful things about me? Did you think that I would mistreat a new girl? I followed you because I wanted to see you, and not your trunk, if you please. I like your spirit; if it had been me, I would have cried myself sick. I need just such a girl as you for a friend. If you will forgive me for following you, shake hands and say you will be my inseparable, if you want a taste of college slang."

Then Hester Hinkle looked into the sweet, honest eyes, and knew that she had found what she longed for, a girl friend. Dell's call lasted half an hour, and in a casual glance she took in the contents of the little room, with its one small window opening on the dismal back yard. There was a shabby half-bed in the corner; a small table near the window with a looking-glass over it that made Dell's aristocratic nose look flat, her mouth about twice its natural width, and her forehead run up high and

narrow. She wondered if it wouldn't shake her pride a little to have to look in that glass every day. The trunk on which Hester sat, and the hard kitchen chair which was her seat of observation, completed the furnishing.

A bell rang in the kitchen, and Hester started to her feet, for this was the signal for her to arrange the table for dinner. Dell placed her pretty hands on Hester's shoulders as she was leaving, and said: "Remember, when you want to see a friend, that Dell Duncan is in Room 15 on the second floor, and the latch-string will always be out when you come."

Hester went to her work with a light heart, thinking that college life could not be so very hard with such a friend as she had found.

It was the first meal at the club; the students were all talking to each other, and Hester was not noticed more than the new table-linen or dishes purchased since last year.

That was all she had hoped for, to be unnoticed. After dinner she dried the dishes while Raphael, the colored boy, washed them. Raphael rang the bells for meals, served drinks at the table, ran errands, washed dishes and made himself generally useful. Mrs. Brady did not believe in allowing her help too much leisure. She thought it spoiled them, and Louise, the colored cook, worked from daylight until dark, in a dull, patient way that made Hester's heart ache to watch her.

It did not take Hester long to become accustomed to the daily routine. She rose at six o'clock to see that the dining-room was in order, then waited on the club as the members came lazily in. She dried

the dishes and rearranged the table for dinner before time for chapel exercises, then attended all of her recitations. After the work was done at dinner, she was free to study until the six o'clock supper.

She found it harder to do the work in class than it had been with her kind friends at home, but she had taken the rigid examination with such ease that the "little man with the knowin' look in his eyes" had been agreeably surprised, and had spoken well of the training she had received from her friends at home.

She soon learned to love and respect her instructors. There were the diminutive Dr. Phelps, president, or head boss, as her father called him; Miss Margaret Maxwell, professor of mathematics, with her sweet, serious face and gentle voice; Professor Wendall, the white-haired, courteous old gentleman, who taught Greek; and Eugene Rice, professor of English. The other students laughed at this big, awkward fellow, who never knew what to do with his hands or feet when in society, but Hester listened to his eloquent words, and, watching the light that came into his dark eyes as he talked, wondered how they could jest about his hands and feet.

Hester found life different from the dear home life at Brandt's Crossing, where every one had loved her, and treated her with respect. A few of the girls treated her with open contempt, and the boys felt compelled to laugh at their witticisms, unless Dell Duncan was near. They felt a little bit afraid of the flash that would come into her

blue eyes over any rudeness shown toward Hester, and the girls at the club were careful of what they said before her, but she was not always near and could not really know what Hester suffered, for Hester was too proud to complain to any one. The letters she sent home were bright and cheery, without a hint of the trials she had to endure, but full of praise of the kindness of her new friend. They came as rays of sunshine to the two lonely old people, who had sacrificed more than she could ever know to give her the opportunity they had missed.

The little room next to the kitchen was hot and uncomfortable through the sultry autumn days, and Dell found many excuses for bringing Hester up to her own comfortable room to study, saying that she was lonely and needed some one else in the room, and Hester was glad to go.

CHAPTER IV.

The last day of October rolled around, and Dell, hearing a crowd of girls coming up the stairway to her room, shut herself in the closet in a spirit of mischief, just to see what the girls would do. They came into the room in great glee, calling for her, but, not finding her, they took possession of her comfortable couch and rockers, all talking at once. Presently Dell heard, above the uproar, Mim Brown's voice, saying: "It's a good thing Dell don't know about the boys' plans for to-night, or she would nip them in the bud. You know Keith Carroll has made up a crowd of boys to go out serenading, and they have fixed up the most ridiculous song to sing by the window of the room where Dell's *protege* sleeps; it's too funny for anything. I can just see her big eyes, how they will look when she hears it. Hateful, haughty thing, she acts like she was a princess here in disguise."

Dell almost held her breath now, for fear they would discover her hiding-place, but they rattled on for awhile, then left the room and went trooping down the stairs. She then came out of the closet, locked her door, and sat down to study up a scheme for nipping the plan of serenading in the bud, as Mim Brown had prophesied she would do. After awhile she clapped her hands with delight, and went in search of Hester. She drew her face down into solemn lines and complained of severe headache, and begged Hester to come and sleep

in her room that night. It was Hallowe'en, and she was so nervous, and afraid of their pranks, but didn't want the other girls to know, so, if Hester would come up just after supper and stay with her, she would be so glad.

Hester promised, and Dell hurried away to find the other girls, and plead headache as an excuse for withdrawing from the numerous pranks she usually took part in.

She and Hester retired early, and Hester, tired from the day's work, soon slept soundly. Then Dell, creeping out of bed, filled the wash-bowl with water from her pitcher and carried it to the end of the long hall, where Mrs. Brady had a closet for bedclothing. She crept into the closet, shut the door, and raised the window that looked down upon the back yard; she then poised the bowl on the window-ledge and waited. She did not have long to wait, for the serenaders had decided to make their starting-point by Hester's window. Dell heard them clear their throats and begin:

"Hush, little Hester, don't you cry,
You'll be a huckster by and by;
You'll be a huckster, you'll be a huckster,
You'll be a huckster by and by."

They started to repeat the chorus, and Dell had tipped the bowl to give them a shower bath, but it slipped from her fingers and went crashing down in their midst. She heard a smothered howl of rage and pain and the crash of the bowl on the cement walk, then she closed the window cautiously and fled to her room. She lay awake half the night with feelings of wicked delight mingled with un-

easiness. In the gray dawn she dressed, and, slipping noiselessly out of the house, ran down the street to where a dealer in hardware and notions lived back of his store. She aroused him with her hurried rapping, and, after selecting a bowl like Mrs. Brady used in her rooms, she handed him a five-dollar bill, asking him to break the odd pitcher or put it out of sight; to keep the bill and say nothing about it. The old man nodded knowingly, and chuckled over his bargain, for it was a seventy-five-cent set.

Dell was innocently making her toilet when Hester awoke, greatly refreshed from the rest in a comfortable bed, but, fearing that she had overslept by being so far from the noise of the kitchen, she hurried downstairs, and waited on the table with such a bright face that the members of the club looked wonderingly at each other. Keith Carroll carried a huge black lump over his right eye, and refused to answer Dell's anxious inquiries with regard to it. Later in the day, a committee of investigation from the serenading party waited on the old hardware man, asking if he had an odd pitcher belonging to a wash-set, and if he had sold an odd bowl lately.

The old man showed them through his stock, until they were satisfied, and wisely held his peace, for he knew when he had made a good bargain, so the shower-bath remained a mystery.

In the weeks that followed, Dell Duncan gradually won Keith Carroll over to her way of thinking, that Hester Hinkle was a worthy young lady, and deserved much better treatment than she was

receiving. It was not hard for Dell to influence Keith, for they were the best of friends, and Keith admired the merry-hearted girl more than any other girl he had ever known. His handsome, aristocratic mother admired her, too, and used every means in her power to bring them together, for Judge Duncan's only daughter was in every way a desirable companion for her handsome son. At first, Hester resented his kindness, but when she found it was really genuine, she forgave past offenses. She looked on him as Dell Duncan's rightful property, as did every one else at Delmar College. She felt that it was right for her to accept the little attentions that Dell prompted him to pay to her, and her pleasures were so few that she could not afford to refuse those that came to her.

Hester found Sunday a hard day at the club. On account of the late breakfast and extra courses at dinner, there was little time for her to attend church services. Once Dell had prevailed upon her to accompany her to the fine church which she attended, but Hester felt so miserably out of place in her plain clothing, that Dell gave up asking her to go there, but one Sunday afternoon she came to Hester's room in the plainer clothing she wore during the week, and said, "Get your Bible, and put on your hat quick, and go with me up to the mission school. Professor Rice asked me to go and teach a class, and I dread it so much." Hester went with her, and found herself appointed as teacher of a class of disreputable-looking boys. She taught the lesson the best she could, but felt that she had made a dismal failure of it.

She went the next Sunday from a sense of duty, and found a new boy added to her list, a boy so hopelessly ragged and dirty that the worst-looking boy of the previous Sunday edged away from him, leaving him in possession of one end of the seat. He gave his name as Dasy Miller, and when she asked him a question, he sat staring at her helplessly, while the other boys shouted in concert a line from the popular song that had found its way even to the slums:

“Daisy, Daisy, give him your answer, do.”

Hester looked around in consternation to see the effect of this outburst, but in the general uproar it had not attracted any attention, each teacher having enough to do to attend to his own class. She felt a thrill of pity for the ignorant, hopeless-looking little fellow.

In explaining it to Dell, she said: “I know how to sympathize with him, for he is just as far behind the ways of the mission school as I am behind the ways of your fine Central Church.”

Professor Rice gave his time to superintend the mission school, and was often grieved at the light way in which the college students treated their opportunity for doing good here. Often the little organ was unopened, because no one came to play, and the professor's voice had a trick of failing him when he tried to lead the music, but after Hester came it was all different. She played the simple songs, leading them herself with a clear, sweet voice. The people came to hear the music, and stayed for the lesson.

Dell Duncan visited the mission fitfully. She did not care for it; for the large, luxurious church, with its well-trained choir, was much more to her taste, but she could not bear the look of distress that came into Professor Rice's dark eyes when she tried to excuse herself from duty. She would feel rebellious at the thought of going just to please the plain professor, then with strange inconsistency she would feel her heart bound with pleasure at the light of approval which she saw in his eyes when she tried to take up her work and feel an interest in it. She found it easier going with Hester. Hester was not an enthusiastic reformer, but she was a conscientious one.

The boys in Hester's class grew quieter and listened to the lesson which she made so interesting, and poor, little, half-witted Dasy looked on her as an angel of mercy. She could not feel that she was really helping him, and at times his adoring, worshipful gaze almost frightened her.

The little mission church soon came to look upon her as their own special property, and from doing the work from a sense of duty, it soon came to be a pleasure.

CHAPTER V.

One day late in November, when Hester had carried her books up to Dell's room to study, she found the occupant of the room lying upon the couch with her face buried in a pillow, sobbing in a heart-broken way. She dropped her books and ran to her, thinking that something dreadful had happened.

Dell sat with red eyes and disheveled hair. "It's nothing, nothing at all," she answered to Hester's anxious questions. "I'd like to just know how you keep from crying, Hester Hinkle, when everything goes wrong. I never saw you cry yet, and I know you have more excuse for crying than I have."

"Aunt Martha broke me of the silly habit," Hester answered.

Dell had heard all about Aunt Martha, and asked eagerly, "How did she do it? I wish you would tell me, for I'm such a baby."

"Aunt Martha never believed in crying, and she taught me never to cry over anything I could help, and never to cry over anything I couldn't help, and that took away about all excuse for crying at all; and she always wound up her lecture by saying, 'Cryin' is mighty hard work and mighty pore pay, I'll tell you,' and as I grew older I found it was true."

Dell laughed over the quaint lesson, and explained her grievance. She was taking a special course in literature to please her father and Professor Rice. She didn't care a single bit for it, and

did not want to be literary; but they had persisted in believing that she had talent, and to-day Professor Rice had asked the class to write original stories on the endowment fund, offering a prize of fifteen dollars for the best, which would be used as a leaflet in behalf of the college. "I can't do it," she said; "I've tried all afternoon, and I just can't think of a single thing only that silly old autograph album verse that ended with 'There's nothing original in me, excepting original sin,' and I won't try it, so there. I don't care for their fifteen dollars, but I don't want Professor Rice to be disappointed in me. I can't bear for him to find out that I haven't one bit of talent."

Hester was thinking of the fifteen dollars, and how much it would mean to her. She had seen only the other day, in a shop window, a shaggy beaver coat, fur-topped gloves, and heavy felt shoes; the outfit was marked fifteen dollars. She had thought then of how badly her father needed such things on his long, cold drives over the country. If it was only possible for her to win the prize and take them home at Christmas, how proud she would be!

Finally she said: "Dell, let me do it for you, and if it wins the prize, let me have the money, and you can have the honors."

Dell looked at her aghast, but she continued: "I know it would be dishonest, and I do not believe I was ever tempted to do anything dishonest before, but I want the money so badly for Christmas, and you want the honor."

Dell still hesitated, and Hester said: "Maybe

you think I couldn't do it. It wouldn't be the first story I ever wrote, and Professor Earle used to say I showed decided talent too. Do you know, Dell Duncan, why I came to college, why I work so hard to stay here, and why I put up with all the slights and snubbing the other students have felt called upon to give me, just because I am poor, and have to work my way through? Well, I can tell you. It is because I long to learn to write a great book, that will do good in the world. I want to do some great thing, and I felt that I could do it if I only had an education, and I am willing to endure anything for the sake of the work I long to do. Now you know what has kept me up through it all. When Mim Brown has been especially aggravating, I have thought in a pitying way, 'You poor, shallow-brained thing, you couldn't write a book if you took forty college courses.' And when Lou Martin has boasted that her ancestors were all Eastern people, and has turned up her mite of a nose at the Hoosiers and common working people, I have said to myself, 'Show her, Hester Hinkle, what a Hoosier can do, and that genius may spring from the common people.' "

Dell Duncan clapped her hands with delight, then hugged Hester closely as she paused with shining eyes, then said: "You dear old close-mouthed thing! Why didn't you ever tell me that I was chumming with a genius? If you will only look like this [whirling her in front of the mirror], and talk like you've been doing, and write like you intend to do, you will have the world at your

feet, and Dell Duncan for your adoring servant." But before Dell had finished her burst of enthusiasm, the glow had faded from Hester's cheek, and she was her quiet self again.

All the next week Hester worked until late at night, writing and rewriting the story, until she thought it was as good as it was possible for her to make it, then Dell copied it in her own beautiful handwriting and handed it in for the contest, feeling that Professor Rice could see the deception with his clear eyes.

One morning in the first week in December, at the close of the lesson in literature, the decision of the judges was given, and Dell Duncan was called forward to receive the prize.

Professor Rice was proud of his pupil, who had shown even greater ability than he had given her credit for. He gave the story warm, heartfelt praise, and took the deep flush that spread over Dell's face merely as a sign of girlish modesty. Dell hurried from the room, and went in search of Hester. When she found her, she gave her the money, saying: "I feel like I had acted the part of Judas, only worse. I have deceived my father and the best of teachers, and have done injustice to my best friend, all for fifteen pieces of silver."

But Hester answered bravely: "You did it from an honest desire to give pleasure to others. It was I who did the wrong for the silver. I am sorry I tempted you, Dell."

Both felt miserable over the deception, and did not speak of the prize money again.

Dell went with Hester to the city to make their

Christmas purchases. She had supposed that Hester had coveted the money to buy some girlish finery, but when she saw the great coat, the gloves and boots wrapped in a huge bundle, and the whole amount of the prize given freely for them, she felt the hot tears rush to her eyes, for she now knew that Hester's story had been a labor of love, and that hers was the greater sin.

CHAPTER VI.

As the Christmas season drew near, the festivities of the college life began. Several receptions were in progress, and Hester thought bitterly of the evening dress and opera cape for which she would have no use. She wondered how she would explain it to Miss Mollie.

One morning Keith Carroll came and asked her to accompany him to a large fraternity reception. She gave him one quick glance, then said, "Tell Dell Duncan I thank her very much for her kindness, but I prefer staying at home."

Keith colored guiltily under the keen look, for Dell had persuaded him, much against his will, to give the invitation, and, murmuring an apology, he hurried away. When he had time to think it over, he admired her spirit, and the quick refusal she had given, and when he was given an invitation to the reception of the sorority of which Dell was a prominent member, with the privilege of selecting his own company, he went straight to Hester.

"I will not take a refusal this time," he said. "You can just ask Dell Duncan if she had a precious thing to do with it."

Dell came to his rescue at once, and Hester laughingly agreed to go with him.

Dell spent sleepless hours worrying how Hester would dress. She loved her dearly, but shrank from having her appear at the brilliant reception in the plain black dress that had done duty as best

all winter. She asked her to come to her room that they might dress together, hoping that in some way she might brighten her costume by the loan of some lace or ribbons.

When the time for dressing came, Hester coiled her wavy dark hair high on her shapely head, slipped into the shimmering gray dress, then turned from Dell's mirror with a flush on her cheeks and a light in her dark eyes, and Dell fairly shrieked with delight.

Keith sent up a dozen lovely, dark red carnations, and when Hester had fastened them in her hair and on her bosom, and had put on the soft gray cape with its rich lining around her shoulders, Dell felt that she would have a rival in beauty for one evening, but was generous enough to be glad.

Dell's father had come to accompany her home for the holidays, and she was proud to introduce her friend to him. She had written to him all about Hester, and he had approved of the friendship with her. She had feared that Hester would feel timid when she introduced her handsome, stately father, but, to her surprise, Hester seemed quite at ease in his presence, for he reminded her of Professor Earle, and she felt no fear.

Keith Carroll started in surprise when the door was opened for him by this apparition of loveliness, for, like Dell, he had felt some fears over her appearance at the reception. He felt now that his fears had been groundless, for, as he reasoned with boyish logic, he had always known that she was a handsome girl, and he might have known

that she would look perfectly stunning in an evening dress.

Hester leaned back in the cab, and drew a sigh of contentment as they were drawn swiftly through the street by the spirited horses. She laughed softly to herself when she contrasted this with her last drive, coming from home in the huckster wagon, drawn by Dan De.

The large reception hall looked like a veritable fairy-land to Hester: she had never seen such a gathering of handsomely costumed people. The flash of lights, and the beauty and the perfume of the flowers, filled her with exquisite delight. Keith escorted her down the long hall enjoying the many glances of wonder that were turned upon his companion, who, all-unconscious of the notice she attracted, walked by his side with her head erect, and eyes bright with happy excitement.

The boys all agreed that the little huckster (as they called her among themselves) had blossomed into a wonderfully good-looking young lady.

Some of the girls were generous enough to acknowledge the wonderful change, while others said spiteful things about her thrusting herself in with her betters; but Hester felt no slights to-night.

Keith was very attentive, and Dell came to her often, to keep her from feeling lonely; and the music, oh, the music! It was what she had dreamed of and longed for all her life. She stood near the screen of palms that hid Matilini, the harpist, and while others, who were accustomed to his music, chatted and laughed, she listened with her whole soul. Matilini watched her with

approving eyes, seeing the rapt attention she gave to his music. So few of the people for whom he played ever really listened. He was just a part of the decorations, like the screen of palms. It was sweet, so sweet, to find a listener in all that great crowd, and he played for her alone, played as he had not played since he had come from his beloved Italy. Once, when she had moved away for a time, he missed her, and had asked Keith Carroll, "Where iz zee lady, zee beeyutiful lady, in zee dress," motioning toward his breast and over his arms, and Keith had brought her back to Matilini's corner, telling her laughingly of the compliment.

Suddenly there was a stir near the door, and people turned to see a ruddy-faced, white-haired man entering the hall. Dell Duncan grasped the situation in a moment; it was Hester's father. Hester had told her he was coming to-morrow to take her home, and he had come to-night and was looking for Hester. Dell clasped her hands tightly to keep from showing her agitation. She was standing between Keith and her own handsome father, and she watched to see how Hester would stand the surprise.

Hester was the last person in the room to notice his entrance. When the music stopped, she turned toward the door and saw him. She caught her breath hard for one instant, then started down the length of the hall alone. She walked quickly toward the door with glad love-light shining in her eyes, and the old man waited for her with an anxious look on his face. When she reached him,

she placed her hands on his shoulders and kissed him, pouring out glad words of welcome, forgetting the people who were watching.

Hiram Hinkle stood holding her hand, as if he feared he would lose her again, and gazed into her bright face with eyes filled with pride.

Dell drew a quick breath of relief, and said, "If she had failed in giving him a welcome, I think I should have hated her," then, turning to her father and Keith, she said, "Now let's go and help her."

Keith hesitated a moment, and then excused himself, for he had seen the boys watching to see how he would take the surprise, and his courage failed him. Dell gave him one scornful look, then crossed the room with her father.

Hiram Hinkle was glad to meet Hester's friends; he felt that he knew Dell quite well already from his daughter's letters home. Judge Duncan soon drew him into conversation, and found him an interesting talker, and the reception went on as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Hester's father had explained to her that he had come a day sooner than he had intended, and being told that she was at a reception, and "seein' as he had his Sunday clothes on, thought he'd just step over and see how they carried on." He wanted to start home early in the morning, and he thought they had best not stay late at the reception.

Hester did not see Keith Carroll again. In the excitement of seeing her father, she had not noticed any lack of attention on his part, and when her father thought that it was time for them to go,

she sent Dell to thank Keith for his kindness and to excuse her, saying that she was going back to her room with her father. Whereupon Keith drew a breath of relief.

While Hester had gone for her wraps, Hiram Hinkle turned to the patroness who had received him when he came. He looked proudly after his daughter as she ascended the long stairway, and said: "I felt kind o' juberous about sendin' Hettie away to college. I was afraid she might feel herself above her old father, but, la! I might 'a' knowed better. Hettie always was a good child, and so like her mother; *she* always wanted an education, and didn't get it, and she made me promise that I'd try to give Hettie a chance. I was afraid it might make ag'inst her, havin' to work for her board and wear her old clothes, but I see it ain't made no difference with you folks, and I'm mighty proud to have met you," and he held out his hand to bid her good-by.

Mrs. Van Tassell clasped the rough hand with her jeweled one, as she said heartily, "You have a daughter that any one might be proud of."

As she bade Hester good night, she whispered, "Be good to your father, dear," and Hester wondered at the tears in her beautiful eyes, for she could not know that the talk with her father had brought to Mrs. Van Tassell memories of her own kind-hearted, awkward old father, who had made a fortune, and then died opportunely, leaving the fortune to her without the incumbrance.

CHAPTER VII.

In the gray dawn of the early morning Hester went up to Dell's room to say good-by; then she and her father started for Brandt's Crossing, in the huckster wagon drawn by Dan De.

On the way her father told her of the death of John Hart's father.

"Just died settin' in his chair," he said. "He'd been talkin' with John about his work, and some plans for a new route in the spring. John took his death awful hard, but I told him he ought to be thankful his father went so quiet without any suffering. Seems to me that's such a blessed way to die, just to lay down your work when you can't do it justice any more, and go home."

Hester was sorry for John in his bereavement, but the thought came: "Now he can have the opportunity to get an education too."

When they came in sight of the village it seemed to Hester that it had surely dwindled in size, and the houses looked small and shabby; she had never noticed it before. But the hearty welcome awaiting her made her feel ashamed of the thoughts that had come at first sight of her home.

She did not remember ever seeing Aunt Martha so moved before. The good soul would not acknowledge that they had needed her at home at all, but said: "It seemed still without Hettie's tongue forever a-runnin'."

Hester could see by the light in her father's eyes how glad he was to have her at home. To

the neighbors and friends who flocked in to see her, she was the same sweet, unspoiled girl, and those who had prophesied dire things of Hiram Hinkle's course in sending his daughter away to school, now wagged their heads proudly as they said: "I told you it wouldn't spile Hettie to educate her; she ain't one of them kind that ever thinks herself above old friends."

Hester told Miss Mollie all about the reception, with its music, lights and flowers, its crowd of handsome, well-dressed people. Miss Mollie's face glowed with pleasure as she listened.

"Now you see I was right," she said, as she nodded knowingly. "I told you you would need an evening dress and wrap for them big occasions, and I'll venture there wasn't a prettier girl there than you, and I'm proud I had the chance of making one fine evening dress in my life; it's 'most as good as being in things myself."

It seemed good to see Mrs. Talbot and Professor Earle, and tell them of her work. It was gratifying to see their looks of pride as she told them of the words of praise Dr. Phelps had spoken of the excellent training she had received at home.

When she walked home from Professor Earle's with John Hart, the last evening of her vacation, they took the river road and stopped on the bridge for a last talk.

Hester asked John when he intended going away to school, and he answered gravely: "I have given it all up."

"I knew you would think it strange," he said as he saw her look of surprise. "Sometimes I think

so myself when I remember how I longed to go when I knew it was impossible. I hope you will not think me vain when I tell you I know that I am needed here. While so many go away to prepare themselves for some great work in the world, the work near at hand is neglected. The people on my route watch for my coming, and I try to help them in every way I can. I find so many little things that I can do that is a great help to them, and I know that I can be a help to the little church. We are having a hard struggle to hold our own now, and a few members less would mean death to the church. I feel that my place is here, and I intend to stay."

When he paused, Hester said impetuously: "I am disappointed in you, John Hart. How can you give up your hopes and ambitions so easily? I had thought you were made of better stuff than to yield for fear of a few pangs of conscience."

He winced with pain at her words, and found himself wondering if she would have thought it easy to fight the battle that he had fought between inclination and duty, but he did not tell her all.

Then she told him what she had kept back from the others, of the mistreatment she had endured, and expected to still endure, for the sake of the education she craved.

He turned toward her with a look of pain on his handsome face as he said: "I can't bear for you to suffer so. Don't go away again; stay here at home where every one loves and respects you."

She laughed brokenly as she said: "Why, John,

you wouldn't rejoice with me. Why are you sorry for me?"

Then, in his honest, straightforward way, he told her all that he had hoped for their future; of the love that had grown stronger and stronger, as he saw her going away from him into a larger, fuller life.

Hester stood looking down at the sullen, moaning river, that struggled with the icy barriers that checked its progress. She felt a sudden bitter resentment toward this friend of her childhood, who was asking her to give up her cherished hopes because his own ambition was crushed. She would not listen; she would be like the river below, breaking away from everything that tried to check her progress.

When she turned to him again, he seemed to read her thoughts in her open countenance, and said sadly: "I see that I was wrong; I had no right to ask you to give it all up for me. I had resolved never to tell you of my love, unless I could hope to be your equal, but when you told me all that you had suffered I forgot my resolutions. I am sorry that I have pained you; I will never speak of this again, but if at any time you should grow disheartened or weary of the other life, and your heart should turn to me, you will know that I am still unchanged, for my love for you shall be just as strong and steady as the flow of this dear old river that we have both loved all our lives."

He held out his hand to her, and as she said good-by, she felt the bitterness leave her heart, and in

its place swept a great wave of pity and respect for the love she could not return.

The next day she rode again to college in the huckster wagon. Only a few of the students had returned from their holidays, so no comments were made on their arrival.

When Hester kissed her father at parting, her heart ached over the lonely look that came into his eyes. She clung to him as if she would never let him go, but at last he pulled her arms loose in a playful way as he said: "Pshaw, now! you'll make such a baby of me I'll never stand it to go home without you, if you ain't careful. Let's just think it won't be long till summer, and then I can have you all the time." Then, with an affectionate pat on her shoulder, he climbed into the wagon and drove quickly away.

CHAPTER VIII.

The work at the club seemed harder to Hester after the week at home under Aunt Martha's indulgent care. The little room, warmed only from the long dining-room that had no heat to spare, was cold and uncomfortable.

Her heart ached over the loss of John Hart's friendship, for she felt that they could never again feel the same, after John had told her of his hopes.

Keith Carroll, remembering his cowardly desertion of her at the reception, acted shy and unlike himself.

Dell Duncan was busy with her studies, for it was her last year in college. She was trying to do some extra work, and Hester did not feel free to go to her room as often as had been her custom.

In January, a revival meeting was started at the mission church, and Professor Rice asked her to play, and lead the singing for them.

She felt that she could not refuse his earnest request, so she hurried with her lessons in the short afternoons, that she might go with him to help the people who had so few pleasures in life.

One morning, she arose feeling that she did not have the strength to go through with the day's duties. Her head throbbed painfully, and at noon Raphael, seeing how pale she looked, said, "I wouldn't go in the dinin'-room to wait on them 'streperous young students, Miss Hester; 'deed I wouldn't; you jes' look like a ghost; I'll see if I kain't manage 'em once."

Hester would not listen to his kindly reasoning; she knew that Mrs. Brady found plenty for him to do, without his taking her place.

Keith and Dell were late to dinner, and the members of the club, seeing that her champions were not present, treated her with less respect than usual, making rude jokes at her expense.

She waited on them patiently, and was changing the dishes for dessert. She had lifted the heavy tray to carry it to the kitchen, when one of the boys called out, "I am in a hurry, so please wait on me first, Miss Huckster; oh, beg pardon, Miss Hinkle."

Some of the ruder ones laughed at his wit, but Hester turned white, staggered blindly and fell, letting the tray of dishes crash down at the feet of Dell and Keith, who had just come in.

Dell gave a cry of alarm and knelt by her side, while the students left the table and stood looking on with frightened faces.

"Why don't some of you help me?" cried Dell, imperiously. "Keith, you and Jack Brown carry her up to my room, and, Jasper Dean, run as fast as you can go for Dr. Gray."

Jasper Dean was glad to do something, for his conscience was stinging him over his insolent wit that he felt had caused Hester to give way.

When Dr. Gray came, he found his patient conscious, but very weak. He gave her careful attention, prescribing perfect quiet, and strictly forbidding any work whatever, for a time.

Dell followed him to the lower hall, and there found the Brady Club waiting anxiously for the

doctor's decision. To their inquiries, he answered gravely, "She is suffering from nervous trouble brought on by overwork and worry of some kind."

He glanced at them kindly, and Mim Brown sank down on the lower step of the stairway, saying, "Oh, I never dreamed that she took all our thoughtless remarks to heart, and I'm so ashamed and sorry," and she fell to sobbing aloud.

Then followed a general season of confession, with good Dr. Gray acting as father confessor. He listened to it all gravely, then said: "I am sorry for the poor girl. I was a poor boy in college once; I carried slops and sawed wood for my board, and I can have some idea of what she has endured. I am extremely sorry for you young people who have acted in so thoughtless a manner; my patient will not die, and you have the rest of the year to make up for what has passed. I think kindness will prove as beneficial in her case as any of the medicines I have left."

He passed on out of the hall, and left them planning what they would do to show their sympathy and regret. Those who had been rude to Hester felt no worse than did Keith and Dell. Keith reproached himself for his neglect of her, and Dell remembered the days when she had left her to study in the cheerless little room, while she sat alone in her luxurious apartments. Hester's first thought was of her father, and she begged Dell to not let him know of her illness. Dell promised, and after she had seen that Hester was comfortable and resting well, she went in search of Mrs. Brady, and asked that Hester's belongings might be moved up

to her room. "I have a perfect right to ask it," she said, in her convincing way. "Father has always paid double the price of your rooms because I did not want a roommate, and now that I want one it's just the same to you as if she paid; and another thing, I want to do her work in the dining-room until she is able to go back."

Mrs. Brady objected to this, saying that she knew Miss Dell's father would not allow it.

Dell silenced her by saying, "Father lets me do just as I please at home, and I'll do the same here." So it was settled.

The next morning the club was surprised at being waited on by Dell, looking very demure, but with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. When they questioned her, she answered, "Mrs. Brady is letting me fill Hester's place until she can come back, and don't you dare let her know what I am doing; she must think I am doing extra work at the library while I am in here."

In the days that followed, the Brady Club tried in every way to make things pleasant for Hester, the girls going every day to read for her.

At first they felt shy, but Hester was too weak and tired to show resentment for past offenses, and when she saw that their sympathy was genuine, she became so gentle and lovable that they lost their fear of her and found the time spent in Dell's room very pleasant.

The room was fragrant with the flowers that the boys sent, and Hester never tired of them, but the flowers that gave her most pleasure were Keith Carroll's offering, which he sent each day, with

always a tiny note of good wishes or some quaint remark that brightened the whole day.

Sometimes Hester watched Dell closely when she brought in Keith's flowers, but Dell was always her merry self and did not seem to care.

Professor Rice came with an anxious look on his face, reproaching himself bitterly for his thoughtlessness in not seeing that it was asking too much for her to go every evening to the mission, after performing all her other duties.

When he praised her work, and gave her the loving messages the people sent, Hester saw a cloud come over Dell's sunny countenance, and thought perhaps Dell was a bit envious of the praise that Professor Rice gave her work, and when he was starting away she begged Dell to go with him to play and sing for the meeting. She said: "I don't mind at all staying alone; I am so sorry about giving up my work, and I would be so glad if you would go in my place until I am well again." So Dell took her place at the little church, and was so happy and interested in her work that Professor Rice was delighted.

In the meantime, Dell waited on the table and dried dishes until her pretty hands were red and rough. The other members of the club were considerate of their new waiter, and she made no complaint, but she was glad when Mrs. Brady came in one day at dish-washing time, and, taking the towel from her hands, told her she need not dry the dishes any more.

Dell relinquished the towel without a murmur, but at the door she paused and called back: "Oh,

Mrs. Brady, you mean that Hester won't have to dry the dishes any more when she comes down. I hadn't thought of that, but of course if she rooms with me, her waiting on table will be enough for her board; I'm so glad you thought of it; it was so good and kind of you." And, coming back, she gave Mrs. Brady a sounding kiss on her broad, red face.

Mrs. Brady dared not raise any objections to this new arrangement (although she knew she would have to hire more help in the kitchen), for Judge Duncan's daughter was her best roomer, and the life of the Brady Club.

When Dell knew she was well out of sight in the hall, she took out her handkerchief and wiped her pretty mouth. "Ugh," she said, with a shudder, "it's so disagreeable to blarney some people."

When Hester had fully recovered her strength and went downstairs, it seemed like going into a different life. The girls were kind, and tried to make her feel that she was one of their number, and the boys were as courteous to her as they were to Dell Duncan. She received all their attentions in her quiet, lady-like way, but clung all the closer to Dell, her first friend. She was glad to be rid of the dish-drying, and she found it easier to study in Dell's comfortable room.

The last days of January passed pleasantly, and, beginning the new month, Hester felt that with her renewed strength and the pleasant friendships she could do more and better work than she had ever done. Her teachers were kind, and her eager mind

grasped the lessons they taught, and made them her own.

She was with Dell and Keith constantly, and found the companionship very pleasant, and her friends, in turn, saw new beauties in her character every day.

One day early in March, Dell came into the dining-room at noon with a worried look on her face. She spoke to Mrs. Brady a moment, then called Hester to her, and gave her a note, telling her that a young man was waiting in the hall to see her.

Hester turned pale as she recognized Aunt Martha's precise writing. Her hand trembled until she could hardly hold the paper to read the lines asking her to come home, for her father was sick.

"Don't be worried," she added at the last; "he is not dangerous sick. Dr. Talbot says he had a stroke, and he doesn't seem to get over it very quick. He didn't want me to write or send for you, but I had promised and I always keep my word."

Hester went into the hall, and found John Hart waiting for her. In her anxiety for her father, she had forgotten their last meeting, remembering only the old days of their friendship. This made the meeting easier for both.

She never remembered how she got ready for the trip home. It was Dell who packed her trunk, and attended to everything. The Brady Club showed their sympathy for her, by flocking around her at parting, with kindly wishes that she might find her father better, and that she might soon return.

Dell and Keith were the last to bid her good-by, and as she looked back at the turn in the drive,

she could see them standing on the steps of the college building waving their hands to her.

John tried to be cheerful on the dreary drive home, but Hester would not be comforted. She had never known her father to be sick, and she could not imagine what home would be like. Then came the terrible thought, what would life be like if he should be taken from her, the kind old father who had guided her and cared for her ever since she could remember?

When they reached home, and she had started towards the house, she remembered that she had not thanked John for his kindness. She turned and held out her hand to him, but she could not utter one word. Something seemed clutching at her throat, until it choked her; but John understood.

When she opened the door, Aunt Martha met her with loving embrace, and there was father in his arm-chair, with a glad smile of welcome on his face. She ran to him, and, kneeling by his side, sobbed out all the miserable fear and heartache she had kept under restraint during the long drive.

He smoothed her hair awkwardly with his left hand, for the strong right arm hung helpless by his side, but he comforted and soothed her, as he had done when she was a little child, telling her that the doctor said he would soon be about again and as good as ever.

He seemed so bright and cheerful that Hester felt her heart grow light, and she was soon making sunshine about the old house, and helping Aunt Martha make things comfortable for father.

CHAPTER IX.

Days passed and Hiram Hinkle did not regain his strength. The hand that had battled against the rough old world for so long still lay helpless by his side. The neighbors came in through the day and found him cheerful, but they could not know of the long nights when he lay awake trying to solve the problem of what would become of Hettie, now that he could not work. Aunt Martha had a comfortable living of her own, and had just moved from her own little home to help him raise his motherless little girl. He had saved enough money to pay for their home, but had depended on his work for their living and for Hettie's education. He was beginning to lose hope of ever being again the same strong man he had been, and he dreaded seeing the look of disappointment come over Hettie's face when she found that she could not go back to college.

One night Hester was aroused by some sound, and was soon wide awake. She had left the door ajar between her room and her father's so that he might call to her if he needed anything. She listened, but father was not calling her; he was praying, and in his earnestness was praying aloud. She heard him say: "O Lord, if you will only give me back my strength for a few years—I can't give up now. The little girl can't have her education without money, and I can't bear to see her disappointed, when she's been so good and patient. O Lord, you took her mother away, and I've been as

brave as I could, and tried to say, 'Thy will be done.' I've took care of the little girl, and tried to raise her right. Surely, Lord, you won't leave me here helpless and let her suffer, for we can't live long this way, without my work. Please give me patience, but, O Lord! don't make me lay around this way 'til I lose my route." And he ended the beseeching words with a dry sob of anguish.

Hester's first impulse was to rush to his side, but a feeling of tender awe held her back. She would never let her father know that she had heard what was intended only for the heavenly Father's ear. She lay awake trying to decide what could be done. She had not thought before of her father's dread of losing his customers, and in her worry over his health, she had not thought of the problem of how they were to live if he did not regain his strength.

Suddenly a thought came to her. Why could not she take her father's place? She could do it better than anything else. She knew the route, for she had been over the road with him dozens of times. She had brought the card from the post-office each day that was sent from the city, telling the latest market prices. To-morrow was his day for the trip over the longest part of the route, and she would go in his place. She would not wait to ask him, but would go before he was awake, and after he had seen how well she could do the work, he would not object. In the gray, early morning, she took the lantern and went to feed Dan De. When she came back Aunt Martha was up, and

getting the breakfast ready. Hester closed the door between the kitchen and her father's room softly, then told Aunt Martha what she intended to do.

"I want to go before father wakes. I'll wrap up well, and put on father's coat. I know the way so well, and I know I can do it; please don't say no, Aunt Martha," she pleaded.

Aunt Martha set her lips firmly together after a fashion she had when much moved over anything, then she fixed Hester's breakfast, and hung the heavy lap-robe by the stove to warm, and Hester knew she had gained Aunt Martha's permission to try her plan.

She harnessed Dan De to the wagon, and wrapping herself in the great coat and heavy robe, she set out for the long day's work. A chill March fog was in the air, the road was frozen and the wagon jostled and jolted over the rough roads. She could see the lights across the fields at distant farmhouses, but no one was stirring abroad yet, and she felt that she and Dan De had the whole gray old world to themselves.

After an hour's drive she came to the first house on her route. The women folk of the farmhouse came out in a body, glad that the huckster had come at last, but many were their exclamations of surprise when Hester turned down the heavy robe and stepped out of the huge coat. They had heard of her father's sickness, and it did not take long to explain to them that she intended to take her father's place. They were a plain people, who understood well what it meant for the bread-win-

ner in the house to be disabled. Their kindly sympathy went straight to Hester's heart, but there was no time for sentiment, and after answering all of their well-meant questions, and making note of a dozen different remedies that were sure to bring him out in no time, she proceeded to business, for she had a long drive to make before night. Her father's customers all along the route met her with helpful, encouraging words, and she soon proved to all of them that they were dealing with a very businesslike young woman. The people all knew her and did not stand on ceremony, but called her Hettie, just as they had heard her father do. The stock of dry goods in the big box ran low, as the other boxes filled with eggs and butter, and the coop under the wagon filled with chickens. The customers who seldom went to town in the winter, wanted to trade out the price of their produce. The women seemed glad of a chance to send by a woman for things they so much needed, and Hester received so many orders that her note-book was full.

It was almost night when she reached Brandt's Crossing. She put Dan De in the barn and fed him well, patting his smooth gray neck before she left him. Aunt Martha helped her carry in the butter and eggs, and put the chickens in a coop in the shed, and told her how her father had worried about her all day long.

Hester almost dreaded seeing him, but when she came in fresh and rosy from the cold air, and told him of her good luck all through the day, and showed him how many orders she had received dur-

ing the day for the next week, his eyes shone with pride, and he laughed heartily as she told off on her fingers the various remedies that had been recommended for his use. After she had cheered him up a bit, she came close to his side, and smoothing his soft white hair, said gently: "You must not worry, father, when I am away. You have taken care of me for so long, now I'm going to take care of you. I am going to the city with the marketing to-morrow. Don't say no, father; some one will have to do it, and there is no one but me. No one would dare to hurt me, and I'm sure that I can sell the things all right, for I have seen you do it so often."

Hiram Hinkle dreaded the thought of his pure, sweet daughter going to the city, among the rough market men, without his protecting care, but he knew that it was just as she had said, it had to be done, and there was no one else to do it.

On Saturday morning Hester arose earlier than usual, and, packing the marketing into the wagon, she was soon on her way to the city. When she turned into the pike she found that, early as it was, she was in a long line of huckster wagons all bound for the market in the city, and when, after the long drive, she had reached the city, she found many wagons ahead of her at the market-house. She backed her wagon into the long shed, as near the place where her father always stopped, as she could get it. She then took Dan De to the livery stable near by, and the men eyed her curiously. Most of them knew her from seeing her with her

father, and a few of them knew why she was there in his place.

After she had gone they gathered in the office of the stable, to talk it over. "I tell you she'll have trouble if 'Double-fisted Dave' gets set against her," said one man.

"Double-fisted Dave" was the terror of all the hucksters. He was a great, rough fellow, who settled all difficulties with his huge fists, and it took very little infringement on what he considered his rights, to get him "set against" any one.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said another man. "We'll get him out to one side, and tell him all about Hi Hinkle's trouble, and how his plucky little gal is takin' his place, but we'll let on to him like we don't like it, and we're goin' to try and beat her out of the trade, and I'll bet you that he stands by her, for he allus works by contraries."

"There he comes this minute," said the first speaker, and a hush fell on the crowd as he stalked into the office.

"What does it mean, Hi Hinkle a-sendin' that slip of a gal to market?" he demanded in a loud voice.

The self-appointed spokesman answered: "It jest means that Hi Hinkle's a-tryin' to play off sick, and sendin' that pretty gal of his'n to draw trade away from us fellers, but we're not goin' to have any of his schemes worked on us. We're goin' to beat her out of sellin' that load on market, and she'll have to take it to the commission house and not get much more than she paid. Sneakin' Joe he's a-goin' to skeer her a little about not havin'

any license to sell, and I bet we don't see her here another market day."

The name "Sneakin' Joe" had the same effect on "Double-fisted Dave" that shaking a red rag in a bull's face would have. "Sneakin' Joe" (the most unpopular huckster on the road, on account of his underhanded ways) had brought *him* into trouble on account of lack of license once. He had given him a good drubbing for it, but had never forgiven or forgotten it. He tramped wildly up and down the office, and fairly roared out: "You're a pretty-lookin' set to beat a gal out of her trade, and her father home not able to help hisself. I tell you, he's sick. Hi Hinkle ain't a man that pertends things. As for 'Sneakin' Joe,' you jest let me ketch him tryin' to skeer her about license, the ornery, sneakin' pup; he don't even let his left hand get a glimpse of the meanness he's been doin' with his right hand; jest let me ketch him, and there'll be somebody else skeered," and shaking his fist in the face of the crowd, he stormed out of the office. The men chuckled over the success of their scheme, and went their ways to their day's work.

"Double-fisted Dave" rolled his wagon in by the side of the Hinkle wagon, and Hester felt frightened, for she had heard all her life of the rough, ugly old fellow, but when he spoke to her, offering kindly suggestions about displaying her load of marketing to the best advantage, she soon forgot her fears.

When the market had really opened, the people flocked in to buy. The different husksters all crying their wares at once, made such discord that

Hester felt inclined to run, but "Double-fisted Dave" neglected his own loaded wagon to direct customers to where she stood waiting, and people crowded around, attracted by the neat display, and the appearance of the quiet, ladylike girl. Her load was sold out first of all the long row of wagons.

After she had eaten her lunch, and harnessed Dan De to the wagon, she went to the large wholesale houses, where her father always traded, to get her supplies. She soon had the groceries packed in the empty boxes, but she lingered longer over purchasing the dry goods, trying to select the best and prettiest gingham and calicoes she could get for her money. She added a few notions and a box of ribbons and of laces to her stock, and was soon on her way home. When she had driven several miles, she stopped for Dan De to rest. A wagon went rattling by; then the driver brought the horses to an abrupt stop, and, climbing out of his wagon, came back to her. It was John Hart. He had heard of her trip over the route gathering up the marketing, but he had never dreamed that Hiram Hinkle would allow Hester to go to the city.

"Hettie, why didn't you let me know, and I would have arranged some way for the things to have been sold?" he said anxiously.

She laughed mischievously, as she answered, "I didn't need any help, I'm sure. I sold out before you did." Then she added in a serious tone: "John, you needn't worry over me. I am not afraid to work, and no one will harm me. The men were all kind to me, even 'Double-fisted Dave,'

who was the only one I really feared, but I will promise you one thing, John, if I ever do need help, I will come to you at once, but just so long as I can, I will depend on myself," and with this promise he had to be content.

In the weeks that followed, Hester knew that John Hart shielded her from many unpleasant things. She knew that on market days he timed his starting from home and arrival in the city so that he might be near her, and driving home in the dusky evening, she could hear his cheery whistling, and felt no fear.

One day late in April she had been slow in selling her load. It had been a raw, ugly day, and the people had not crowded the market as usual. It grew late, and she had taken what was left of her load to a commission house, and had sold it at considerable loss. It had been hard work finding just what she wanted at the wholesale houses, and she was late in starting from the city. She felt tired and discouraged, the pike was sloppy from the rains, and the muddy water splashed from Dan De's big feet, and trickled down from the wheels. It grew dark early, and when she had passed the outskirts of town and had reached the first strip of woodland, it was hard to distinguish objects ahead. Hettie dreaded the long drive in the dark, and feared that John, tired with the long wait, had gone on without her.

Suddenly Dan De stopped short and reared violently as a dark object sprang from the dusk of the wood, and caught him by the rein. Hester felt her heart stop beating for a moment; then it beat

so wildly she felt that the man in the road could hear it. She had gathered up the lines tight with the thought of making one desperate effort to force Dan De past the man, when she heard some one coming in at the back of the wagon. The man at the horse's head demanded her money, saying he had no time for foolishness.

A scarf was thrown over her head from behind, but she pushed it up as she cried out, "You cowards, would you rob a woman?"

Then she heard a shrill voice from behind her cry out, "O pap, it's Miss Hester; I can't do it, pap, I just can't."

It was Dasy Miller's voice.

"Shut up, you idiot," came the low growl, accompanied by the ominous click of a revolver. "If she don't hand over her money, she won't be Miss anybody in about two minutes."

The man started toward the wagon, and the boy whispered, "Drive on quick, Miss Hester; he'll hurt you;" then he leaped from the wagon and grappled with the man.

Hester did not wait for further bidding, but as the wagon rattled away, she heard a shot, followed by one shrill scream of pain and terror. Her blood ran cold in her veins, and she urged Dan De on at his utmost speed. When she had driven for a long time so fast that poor old Dan De panted for breath, she heard the rattle of a wagon behind her, and John's cheery voice calling to her. He explained how he had been detained in the city, but had driven hard to catch up with her for fear that she would feel afraid all alone. She tried to

answer in her natural voice, for she had decided that it would be best to let no one know of the hold-up. It would cause her father and Aunt Martha great uneasiness, and it was not likely to ever occur again.

In a few weeks a letter came from Dell telling of her work at the mission. "I have your class," she wrote, "and when they get restless and will not listen to the lesson, I tell them my latest news from you. They are more interested in your doings than in their own salvation. I had to explain over and over about your work to that daffy Dasy Miller, but he is gone now, poor little fellow. They moved from here to the city, and one of the boys told me Sunday that Dasy had been hurt in an accident some way, and died last week."

Hester read the letter on the road as Dan De jogged slowly along, and at the close she shed bitter tears over the brave little fellow who had given his life to shield her from harm.

CHAPTER X.

The days passed away all very much alike, with the three trips out over the country roads and the one trip up the pike to the city each week.

Hester's customers were pleased with the goods she selected for them, and her visits were looked forward to with pleasure. The trade increased until her father said, with a tremulous laugh, that it was well enough that he was laid upon the shelf. It was hard for him to bear the sitting at home, nursing the helpless arm that gained no strength, but Hester's home-coming always cheered him, and she did not let him know how tired she grew of the long drives over the muddy roads.

One thing brightened the monotonous life, and this was the weekly letter from Dell. Letters like Dell's own merry self, full of life and cheer, telling all the college news and of her work at the mission church with Professor Rice.

Occasionally there came other letters to the little office for Hester—large, square ones addressed in a firm, manly hand, and Hester read Keith Carroll's letters over many times before laying them aside. They were written in a bright, friendly vein, much like Dell's letters, and Hester answered in the same way, giving to both such droll and amusing descriptions of her work that they laughed heartily as they compared their news from her.

In one of her letters to Keith she had said: "Your letters are all that I have to remind me

that I was ever Miss Hester, and a college girl. Here I am just plain Hettie, the huckster."

In speaking of this to Dell, Keith said: "I can't bear to have her do it. She is too much of a lady to settle down in that obscure place and do such work. The idea of calling her a huckster!"

Dell laughed mischievously as she said: "She is merely fulfilling your prophecy made last Hallowe'en; the thought of her being a huckster at some time in the future did not seem to worry you then."

Keith looked at her suspiciously for a moment, then turned away, rubbing his forehead in a knowing way.

Sometimes, after reading Keith Carroll's letters, Hester found herself comparing him with John Hart. When she thought of the handsome, well-dressed fellow, John suffered in comparison, but when she remembered all John's thoughtfulness and kindness, she felt ashamed of herself.

Dell wrote of all the festivities of Commencement week, describing the Commencement, in which both she and Keith had graduated with honors. At the close of her letter she asked if she might come to spend the summer with Hester. "Father is going to be busy with some very important cases, and can not take me abroad as he had planned," she wrote, "and I don't want to go to the mountains with Aunt Sue, nor to the lakes with Aunt Clara. If you would only let me come, I would be so glad. I'll pay my board and help Aunt Martha, and I know I can be company for your father while you are out on the road. I

want your Miss Mollie to sew for me, but I want most of all to see you. Now, please say 'Yes.' ”

When Hester read the letter aloud, Aunt Martha said scornfully: “I guess I don’t want no judge’s high-falutin’ daughter a-helpin’ me;” but Hester’s father, seeing the longing look in her eyes and remembering Dell’s sweet, friendly ways, plead her cause so well that Aunt Martha relented, saying rather ungraciously: “I guess she can keep out of my way mostly, and her board money will be a help.”

So the letter was sent telling Dell that she might come, and Hester went herself to meet her at the station with the wagon and Dan De, to bring her and her trunk home.

And Dell came, Dell, with all her sweet, sunny ways, making Hester’s heart glad just to look at her, brightening life for poor, helpless Hiram Hinkle by her kindly sympathy and thoughtful attentions when Hester was away. She read to him when he was awake, fanned him gently while he slept, and, best of all, never tired of talking with him about Hester, the dearest girl on earth.

She dried dishes for Aunt Martha, fed the chickens and hunted eggs, and was so friendly and unassuming that Aunt Martha’s hard heart softened, and she learned to love Dell almost as well as Hester did.

Dell went to church on Sundays with Hester, and soon came to know and love the kind-hearted village folk, and after she had met Mrs. Talbot and Professor Earle, she did not wonder at Hester’s praise of them.

When she unpacked her trunk she showed to Hester a huge bundle of clothes that she had cast aside as out of date, and told her why she had brought them.

"I wanted Miss Mollie to make them over for me, as she did your things. I like a dressmaker that will allow one to have some individuality. I wouldn't dare ask Madame Arnault to remodel a dress, and she never allows me to say what I want or how I want it made. She has always made my clothes, and says she knows what is suitable for a girl in my station in life. Father gives me an allowance for my clothes, and if I can use these and have Miss Mollie make them, I can pay her well and still have a large per cent. of it left, for he makes the allowance to suit Madame Arnault's bills."

After they had talked it over, Dell said: "You are wondering why I am getting so economical, so I will tell you. Since I have been working with Professor Rice, I have learned that extravagance is sin, when so many are in want, and I intend to give the money I can save, for the work at the mission."

Miss Mollie was glad to get the work, and was in her element, planning to make the lovely goods over so that it would look just like new.

She soon learned to love her Hettie's friend, for on the days when Hester could be at home with her father, Dell spent the afternoons in Miss Mollie's pleasant little sewing-room, helping to rip the goods and plan the different costumes.

Miss Mollie never knew how, in the long, quiet

afternoons, she taught lessons in pure, unselfish living to this young girl, brought up in luxurious idleness.

One day Hiram Hinkle insisted that Dell should go with Hester over one route, "Just to see how the huckstering business was carried on," he said.

They started in the cool, gray dawn of a July morning. Dell was wild with delight over the sunrise, the beautiful landscape, and everything that was so new and full of pleasant surprise for her.

She laughed when Hester talked to Dan De, and asked: "Why did you ever call him Dandy? He looks more dignified than dandified to me."

"Who called him Dandy?" asked Hester. "No one ever dared insult his dignity by calling him that before. When father brought him home years ago he was a strong, handsome young horse, and I was reading 'Daniel Deronda.' Now, do you see the connection? The full name made too big a mouthful for father, so he shortened it to Dan De."

"Well, to make up for my insult to his dignity, I will give him his full name henceforth," said Dell.

Hester would not tell Dell anything about the people she would meet that day, saying that she wanted her to see them with her own eyes, and then tell her on the way home the opinion she had formed of each one.

When they came in sight of the first house on the route, Hester drew out the long tin bugle that her father had always carried, and with two or three musical blasts she announced their coming.

When they reached the gate, a little woman came out with a pail of eggs. Her thin wisp of hair was drawn back into a tight button-like ball at the nape of her neck, and her keen little eyes set close together looked suspiciously out on the world that she had found a rough, hard place to live in.

After Hester had counted out the eggs, she said: "Just five dozen, Mrs. Rinker."

"No, no, you are mistaken," was the hurried reply. "I counted them eggs myself, and they was six dozen. I'd 'a' never thought you'd try to cheat a pore woman that a way. I'm shore your father tried to raise you honest."

Dell felt an angry flush sweep over her face, and turned to see how Hester would meet such rudeness, but Hester was calmly lifting out a small box with the eggs in it.

She set it down in front of the woman, and, handing her the pail, said: "I counted them into this empty box, but probably I made a mistake; now I'll watch while you count them back into the pail."

The woman saw that she was caught in her trick, but counted them out, then said doggedly: "I reckon I must 'a' been mistaken."

Hester put them back into the box, then asked pleasantly if she wanted to trade out the amount.

Mrs. Rinker wanted calico for a wrapper. She looked at each piece in the box, asking Hester if they would fade, and chewing a slip cut from the corner of each to convince herself, finally selecting the piece that chewed the toughest, and the colors ran least.

"How many yards do you need?" Hester asked, and Mrs. Rinker answered crossly: "It only took five when I bought a wrapper from your father. He allus measured the length of his arm to the end of his nose, and turned his head the other way to make a full yard, but since you've been hucksterin', and measure with that little short stick, it takes ever' scrap of seven."

Dell turned her head to hide the laugh that would come, over Hiram Hinkle's way of measuring, but Hester soberly measured off seven yards, settled up the trade and they drove on.

The next stopping-place was at Farmer Brown's. At the sound of the bugle, the mother came out, followed by a slender girl with an eager, expectant look on her face. After the trading was done, Hester drew a large bundle of magazines from under the seat, saying: "Here are the magazines I promised to bring you, Bessie. After you read them they are to go to Jamie Rives, and I will bring some more to you."

The girl's face brightened, and she grasped the magazines hungrily. After they had driven on, Hester told Dell of the poor, starved life that Bessie lived, and how she was trying to help her. "I tried to get her mother to subscribe for a good magazine for her," she said, "but when I showed the magazine to her, she said it would be a waste of time and money to take a paper that size. She wanted a big newspaper that would fit on the pantry shelves. I have asked Professor Earle and Mrs. Talbot for their old magazines, and I intend to have a regular circulating library this winter."

Dell promptly decided that she would send a great box of magazines and books for the circulating library when she went home.

At the next house a longer stop was made for Dan De to rest. After the butter was weighed, the eggs counted and the trading done, Dell talked to the sensible little housewife, while Hester heard Jamie Rives recite the lessons she had given him the week before.

She brought out from under the wagon seat more books for the eager boy.

Jamie's mother explained proudly to Dell how Jamie had finished common school work, but they could not send him to college for awhile on account of the bad crop year.

Jamie had grieved so over the wasted time until Hester had come. She had understood just how he felt, and had promised to help him each week, until they could spare the money to send him to some good school.

"I can't tell you, miss, what a blessin' she's been to Jamie, and to all the folks on her route," she concluded.

At noon Dell and Hester ate the lunch Aunt Martha had put up for them, while Dan De ate his oats out of the box trough at the back of the wagon.

After dinner they started back towards Brandt's Crossing, coming in on a different road, and the space under the wagon seat still yielded delightful things. At one place it was a new game for a little crippled boy; at another a book on voice culture was brought out for Leta Darrow. Mrs. Talbot, who had been a fine musician, had loaned it to

Hester for the little girl, promising to come once each month to help her with her music.

Hester asked Leta to sing for Dell. Dell had heard often of this musical prodigy, but had allowed much for Hester's untrained ear. She expected to hear a sweet, simple, childish voice, but as she listened to the pure, rich tones, she fully agreed with Hester that some day Leta Darrow would delight larger audiences, if she could only have proper training.

They drove on through the long afternoon, stopping at the houses that belonged on Hester's route, meeting everywhere a hearty welcome. At last they came in sight of the last house on the route.

Hester raised the bugle to her lips, and blew the melody of that sweetest of songs, "Home, Sweet Home."

In answer to Dell's look of inquiry, she said: "I always blow that tune when I come to Aunt Maggie's, for, next to my own home, hers is the homiest place I ever knew."

Aunt Maggie came to the door with a beaming welcome shining in her kind old eyes. Her spectacles were pushed up on her forehead, but when Hester introduced her friend, she pulled them down, looked intently at Dell, then said: "I like you; you're just the kind of a friend I'd 'a' picked out for my Hettie, and that's sayin' a good deal in your favor."

Hester climbed down from the wagon seat, and unreined Dan De, letting him crop the grass at his feet.

She reached her hand to Dell, saying: "Come

down; we always camp awhile when we get to Aunt Maggie's."

When they entered the neat little cottage, Dell thought with Hester that it was one of the homiest places she had ever seen; everything was clean and bright, Aunt Maggie included.

She invited them into the kitchen, saying she did not have her butter quite ready. She gave them a plateful of crisp, brown cookies, with a pitcher of the fresh buttermilk and two quaint mugs to drink from. Hester laughingly explained to Dell that this was always part of the program at Aunt Maggie's.

When Aunt Maggie had bared her arms to the elbow, she brought out a huge tray of butter. She kneaded the water out of it until it was solid and as yellow as gold. She patted it into long, smooth rolls, laying each one on a clean white cloth. Then she peeled a large potato, cut it in diamond shape at one end and marked the diamond in tiny squares. Dell watched with curious eyes, wondering what she intended to do with it.

After Aunt Maggie had cut and trimmed the diamond to suit her, she planted it firmly in the center of one of the rolls of butter, lifted it to see that the print was all right, then made a row of the diamonds through the center, and along the sides of the roll.

Dell drew in her breath with a gasp of surprise when she saw the clear impression made by this original butter print. She was on her feet in a second, begging: "O Aunt Maggie, let me do it once." Aunt Maggie gave the potato to her, and

watched while she printed the rolls in neat, precise rows.

When she had finished she cried out: "Oh for more butter to print! I should like to stand here forever pressing that diamond into firm rolls of butter. That is the most useful diamond I ever saw."

Aunt Maggie laughed gayly. "No, no, dear, you wouldn't want to do it forever. Hettie used to feel that way about it when she was a little girl and came here with her father, but just see how calm she is now, settin' by and watchin' you do it. Here, Hettie, come and eat your print."

"Aunt Maggie always gave me the print to eat when I was a little girl, and she thinks I must have it yet," said Hester.

Splitting the potato in two pieces, she said: "I'll divide with you to-day, Dell." She gave Dell half, and they laughingly ate the crisp, salted bite.

The butter was wrapped and put in a separate box for Hester's fastidious customers on the market, and, after bidding Aunt Maggie an affectionate good-by, they started on the road toward home.

Dan De was tired, and they drove slowly, stopping sometimes to rest. Once, when they had stopped, Dell turned to Hester and said: "I was to tell you, when we had finished the route, what opinion I had formed of your people. With two exceptions (Mrs. Rinker, and the woman who cared for literature only as a shelf covering), I found them good, whole-souled people. I think I never enjoyed a day so much in my life. Life is so pure and wholesome here. I felt that the people

said what they really meant, and expected me to do the same. I can tell you a discovery I have made to-day, too, Hester Hinkle. You are not a huckster; you are a missionary. There, you needn't look so surprised. Haven't I watched you all day, and seen your influence over these people and the pleasure you bring into their monotonous lives? You have done more kind things to-day than I ever did in all my selfish life."

Dell paused, and Hester clasped one of her hands close as she said: "You shall not depreciate my best friend; no one could be kinder than you have always been to me since I have known you."

Dell laughed as she answered: "My kindness to you was only one form of selfishness. I loved you and wanted you near me."

After a few moments of silence, Dell said, as if in continuation of her first remark: "But you can't stay stay here among them always."

"Why not?" demanded Hester.

"Just because Keith Carroll will not let you."

The answer was so unexpected that Hester's face flushed and she stammered out: "Oh, Dell, I thought, I thought—"

"Yes, I know what you thought," was the quick response. "You thought Keith cared for me, but you were mistaken. We have always been the best of friends, but we are too much alike—both spoiled children—to care for each other as every one seemed determined we should. Keith confided in me his intention of bringing you out of this desert, where you are wasting your sweetness, and he will

do it. He is so strong and handsome you can not resist him."

Hester sat with a troubled look on her face, wondering why both Keith and John should spoil their pleasant friendship by caring for her in this way.

Dell, misunderstanding the look, said: "If you will not believe that Keith and I are only friends, then I must prove it to you by telling you what I have already told him. I have promised to help Professor Rice with his mission work all through life. There now, stare at me as if you thought I had lost my mind. I know it is a surprising thing for Dell Duncan to be willing to give up her life of ease and luxury, but, oh, Hester, it is so easy to give up everything for his sake. When you were sick in January, I couldn't bear to hear Professor Rice praising your work, and feel that he was disappointed in me. It made me feel bitter sometimes even toward you; then, when you gave me your place so willingly, I felt ashamed of my petty jealousy. After I had worked with Professor Rice for awhile, I became interested. When I saw how true and unselfish he was, I tried to make my life like his; but all the time there was the memory of the deception about the prize story rankling in my mind, until at last it made me so miserable I just had to tell him. I remember saying at the last, 'I don't know what you will think of me, but I had to tell you.' And then he told me what he really thought of me. I can't tell you what he said; he hadn't intended telling me until I had finished my college work, and not even then without

first asking father's permission, but he said he did not know what he was really saying until it was all said, and I knew then why it had made me so miserable to deceive him."

When Dell had finished, Hester dropped the lines, and, taking Dell's face in her two brown hands, pulled her toward her and kissed her, as she told her how glad she was. "I had always thought Professor Rice cared for you, Dell, since I first knew both of you," she said, "but I never supposed that there was the least mite of a chance for him to win Judge Duncan's daughter. What does your father say?"

"Father was disappointed at first, but after he had talked to Professor Rice, and knew him better, he was very glad his daughter had made such a sensible decision, but the aunties—I think I have broken their hearts. That is the reason I did not want to go with either of them this summer. Each one of them has some eligible young man in view, and they still hope to alter my decision. I have finished my college work now, and father will take me abroad in the autumn, and when I come home I am coming back to Delmar, to help my professor with the mission church."

CHAPTER XI.

It was late when the girls reached Brandt's Crossing. While Hester took Dan De to the stable, and carried in the marketing, Dell gave to Hiram Hinkle an interesting account of the day. She boasted of Hester's shrewdness and business ability, then spoke in a softer tone of her helpful, winning ways, and of how much the people on the route loved and respected her.

The old man's face glowed over the praise she gave his daughter. He kissed Hester affectionately, calling her "father's little girl," then said he was tired, and Aunt Martha and Hester helped him to bed.

The girls slept soundly through the night, and in the morning Aunt Martha called them to get ready for breakfast.

Hester tiptoed into the room to see if her father was awake. He lay quite still, and she called him gently. He did not answer, and, stooping over, she kissed his forehead, but started back with a cry of alarm, for while they slept, Hiram Hinkle had laid down his work and gone home.

The little village was stirred from its sluggish sleep, and the people mourned with Aunt Martha and Hester the loss of their kind old friend.

To Hester it seemed that life was a blank. It had been easy enough to go out in the world when she had father's counsel and love to rely on, but now she felt weak and helpless. She remembered her promise given to John Hart in a spirit of

fun, to call for him if she ever needed help, and she asked him to attend to everything. It was John who brought the undertaker, who announced the time of the funeral, arranged for music, and did the many things that no one else thought of doing.

The country church was crowded. Many came as friends and many more from a feeling of curiosity, as people do in a country place, where few things happen. After the sermon, in which the gray-haired minister spoke lovingly, in broken tones, of his lifelong friend, the people filed slowly past the casket in which Hiram Hinkle lay. He looked so peaceful that it seemed he was only sleeping. Some few sobbed audibly as they held the little wide-eyed children up to see the dear old man who had been their friend, and Dell felt Hester's form shake with suppressed emotion.

They walked from the church to the little cemetery near by, six of the village men who had been his friends acting as pallbearers. After the grave was filled, the people tucked away their grief and their best handkerchiefs, and went back to their work, and Aunt Martha, Dell and Hester went back to the lonely home.

The next day was a trying one. Hester wandered from room to room trying to be brave and trying to cheer Aunt Martha. In the evening John Hart came, to tell her that he had arranged to take the marketing to the city on the morrow.

He turned away abruptly when she tried to thank him for all he had done for her, for her

voice broke pitifully and her eyes brimmed over with tears.

The next week Hester started on her route again. There were the funeral expenses to be paid, and she knew no other way to pay the debts and make a living.

Aunt Martha did not object to her going. She felt that it might help her to bear her grief to get cut away from the lonely home. Hester met with kindly sympathy everywhere, but the coming home at night to find the arm-chair empty was hard to bear. It had been so comforting after a hard day's work to draw the foot-stool close to the big chair, and tell father all about it, and to have him give advice and smooth her hair while he listened.

Dell and Aunt Martha tried to make the home-coming as cheerful as they could, but there came a letter for Dell one day asking her to come home to prepare for the trip abroad, and inviting Hester cordially to go with them. "There is nothing like travel and change of scene to help one in trouble, and Dell needs some one to help her enjoy the trip," wrote the kind-hearted Judge; but Dell argued and plead in vain.

Hester answered that she had decided to stay at home and keep on with her work, and at last, Dell, wearied with pleading, said: "Oh, Hester, how can you give it all up when you had such grand aspirations? You could go abroad with us and gather material for that book you intend to write. You could do it so well and I never can, and I was going to be so proud of you. Then

you could come live with me and finish your college course. If you bury yourself away out here, what can you ever expect to do?"

Hester answered: "I should like to finish my college work, but I never expect to do it. But the idea of going out of our own beautiful country to gather material for a book seems ridiculous to me. Some authors gather their material from musty volumes of ancient history, trying to weave in their modern ideas with the ancient background. Some few succeed, but others remind me of a picture of the 'Last Supper' that I saw once in an illustrated newspaper. It portrayed the apostles gathered about Christ, attired in Prince Albert coats, patent leather shoes, and the latest style watch-fob. If I ever write, I shall write of life as I find it, and I have found more romance, comedy, aye, even tragedy [with a shudder at the thought of little Dasy], in my common work here, than I would find in a thousand volumes of musty history, or years spent in other lands. As for burying myself here, my life may never count for much, but I shall use it all here. Do you see the stars up there, Dell?" pointing to the myriads of twinkling stars in the blue heaven above them. "There is a passage in God's word, Dell, that tells us he made the sun and moon, the greater lights, to rule the day and night, and he made the stars also, and set them in *their* places to divide the light from the darkness, and he saw that it was good. I believe God set me here to do what I am able to do, and to help the people around me. It all seems plain

to me now. I have longed to be one of the greater lights, forgetting that God made the stars also and set them in their places. Dell, this is my place just as surely as those stars are in their places in the heaven above, and I shall never try to leave it again."

Dell sat quite still on the little porch, her eyes dimmed with tears, but the sunny side of her nature could not long be suppressed, and presently she laughed softly, with a hint of the tears in her laughter as she said: "Oh, you silver-tongued orator, your argument is very convincing, and I will never try again to persuade you to leave your duty, but I can quote Scripture too, since I have taken lessons at the mission, and there is another place in the Bible that says there is a glory of the stars, and one star differeth from another star in glory, and you will never be a common star, my Hester?"

When the day came for Dell to leave them, Aunt Martha said: "Hettie asked me once if I didn't believe in education, and I told her I couldn't tell who I believed in it for 'til I seen it tried on 'em, but I've decided it don't hurt the right kind," and this was the highest compliment Dell ever received.

When Dell had gone, the house was so quiet that Hester and Aunt Martha spoke in low tones, almost frightened at the sound of their own voices.

Aunt Martha looked forward with as much longing for Dell's letters as Hester did, but

when Keith's letters came, Hester hurried to her room to read them alone.

The weeks dragged slowly by, and Hester wondered if life was all to be as gloomy and cheerless as she found it now.

Coming from market one day in early autumn, she saw (looking ahead) that a traveler had stopped to rest under the big oak-tree that was hers and Dan De's favorite resting-place. When she drew near, Dan De refused to go farther, remembering this was the time and place for his afternoon rest. The wheelman arose, and Hester gave a cry of surprise as she recognized Keith Carroll.

He hurried forward with a glad light in his eyes. Hester extended her hand in welcome, but her face flushed as she noticed the contrast between his white, shapely hand and her own, sun-browned and hardened by work.

It took only a little while for Keith Carroll to tell her why he was going to Brandt's Crossing. He plead with her to give up her work for his sake, and come with him to a life of ease and comfort. As she hesitated, he mistook the cause and said eagerly: "No one would dare mistreat my wife because she had been a working girl. We will go abroad with the Duncans for a year, and by the time we return, people will have forgotten that you ever drove this lumbering old wagon and were a huckster's daughter."

It was an unlucky speech, for Hester's eyes flashed as she answered: "I am proud to have been the daughter of a good, honest huckster."

Just then Hester heard the rattle of a wagon, and John Hart's voice singing "The Bend of the River," and it all came back to her, the memory of the day on the bridge, and she seemed to hear him saying, "My love shall be like the steady flow of the river, and if your heart should ever turn to me, you will know that I am still unchanged." She remembered all of his thoughtful care and kindness.

Keith Carroll had offered her the honor of being his wife if she would blot out all the old life, while to John Hart she was worthy to be the wife of any man, and he looked at her sitting on the seat of the lumbering old wagon with as much reverence as if she had been a queen on her throne.

John Hart saw her companion, and was passing on, when she called to him. He stopped his horses, and, climbing out of the wagon, came back.

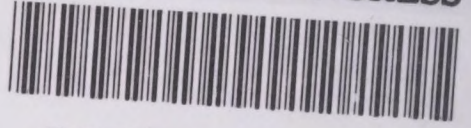
As he stood, strong and manly, on the opposite side of the wagon, Hester felt a thrill of pride as she introduced him to Keith Carroll.

She reached out her hand to him, and as his strong fingers closed over hers, she noted with a thrill of pleasure that *their* hands were very much alike. Then she said with womanly grace, "I have just been telling Mr. Carroll that I am proud to have been the daughter of a huckster," then added, looking straight into his honest eyes, "and I intend to be a huckster's wife."

THE END.

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